

SAINT AND SAGE

BY THE AUTHOR

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SAINT AND SAGE

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FEMININE VIRTUE AND PERSONALITY

DOS LEBEN UN SHAFEN FUN HAFETZ HAYIM
(*in Yiddish*)

SAINT AND SAGE

(HAFETZ HAYIM)

BY

RABBI MOSES M. YOSHOR

BLOCH PUBLISHING COMPANY

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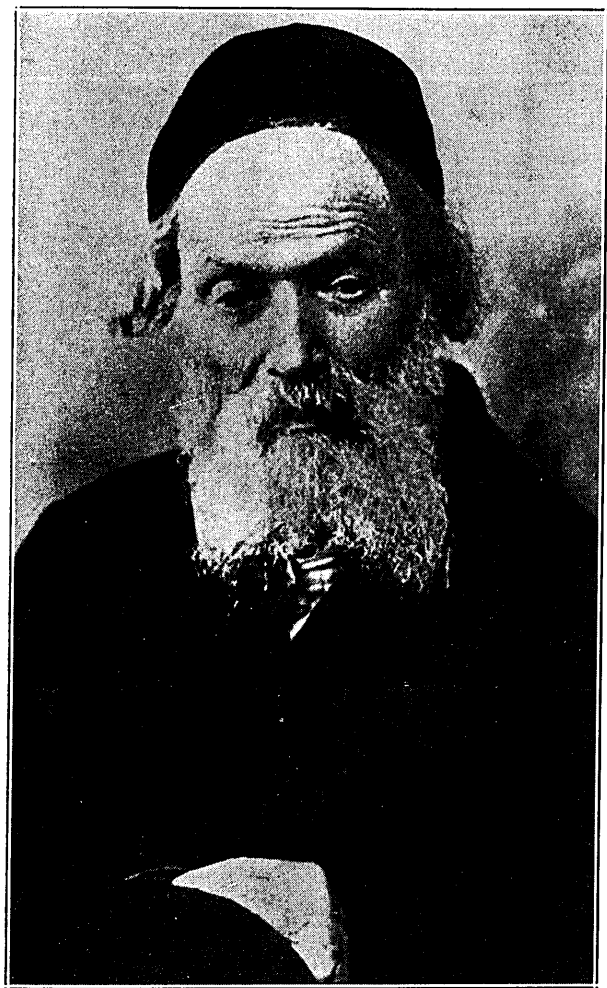
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TO
MY SON MY DAUGHTER
JOSHUA JOSEPH : DEBORAH BLISS
AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED

•
*Let your father and your mother
have reason to be glad; and her
that bore you, to rejoice.*

—PROVERBS xxiii : 25.



THE HAFETZ HAYIM IN 1924

CONTENTS

FOREWORD	i
PREFACE	iii
INTRODUCTION	v

PART ONE

ON THE LIFE OF THE HAFETZ HAYIM

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	BIRTH	23
II.	CHILDHOOD	26
III.	BOYHOOD	30
IV.	MARRIAGE	34
V.	THE SIMPLE LIFE	37
VI.	AUTHOR	43
VII.	RADUN YESHIVAH	49
VIII.	THE PLAIN MAN	57
IX.	RUSSIAN ESPIONAGE	62
X.	GLOOM OF EXILE	74
XI.	THE GREAT ASSEMBLY	82
XII.	A WARNING TO THE POLES	87
XIII.	A DREAM UNANSWERED	90
XIV.	THE END OF HARVEST	95

PART TWO

ON THE TEACHINGS OF THE HAFETZ HAYIM

I.	A TEACHER OF THE PEOPLE	101
II.	A LIVING EXAMPLE	105
III.	HIS UNSWERVING FAITH	110
IV.	THE EVIL TONGUE	119
V.	OF PRAYER	127



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FOREWORD	i
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V.	OF PRAYER	127

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
VI. A FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH	133
VII. ON EDUCATION	140
VIII. THE SABBATH	146
IX. THE HEAD OF THE YEAR	155
X. PIONEERS OF LIBERTY	157
XI. ON KNOWLEDGE OF THE TORAH	163
XII. OF OPTIMISM	168
XIII. ON BECOMING A GOOD JEW	172
XIV. TRENDS AND TIDES IN JUDAISM	175
XV. PRIVILEGED HOMICIDE	180
XVI. LOVE THY NEIGHBOR	184
XVII. JUSTICE AND CHARITY	194
XVIII. CRIME AND PUNISHMENT	199
XIX. ON WAR AND PEACE	208
XX. LIFE AND DEATH	211
XXI. THE KADDISH	213
XXII. ON A TOMBSTONE	216

PART THREE

THE JEWISH WOMAN

I. THE INDIVIDUALITY OF JEWISH WOMAN	223
II. THE MATRIARCHS	228
III. WOMEN IN THE TIME OF MOSES	232
IV. NATIONAL HEROINES	235
V. WOMEN IN THE DIASPORA	240
VI. WOMAN IN JEWISH LAW	245
VII. AS WIFE AND MOTHER	249
VIII. ON FAMILY PURITY	257
A EULOGY—SACRED HERITAGE	267
AN APPRECIATION	273
INDEX	274

FOREWORD

The true history of Israel is the history of the transmission of the Torah in Israel, of the chain of tradition—*shalsheleth hakabalah*—or the succession of teachers from Moses unto the present day. The greatest historical figure in Biblical times after Moses, in the period during which Israel constituted a great nation in the political and economic sense, undoubtedly is David. Yet David lives in the Jewish consciousness as the author of *Tehillim* (Psalms), rather than as the mighty warrior and monarch. Of the period of the Restoration the name which has burnt itself deepest in the Jewish consciousness is that of Ezra, the Scribe, the interpreter of the Torah. Hillel, that great pillar of tradition, is better known to the average Jew than any of the kings and princes who loomed so large upon the Jewish horizon throughout the period of the Second Temple; while Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai, the founder of the Academy of Jabneh, rather than any one of the heroes of the Jewish War of Independence, is the shining star of the close of Israel's career in his historic land.

The life of a great and saintly teacher is therefore a valuable addition to Jewish history. And as such, this ably written work on the *Hafetz Hayim*

by Rabbi MOSES M. YOSHOR, is an important contribution which merits a very high measure of appreciation.

Ours is to our deep regret "an orphaned age", a *dor yasom*, but the age in which the Hafetz Hayim, of blessed memory, flourished, abounded in great men. R. Israel Meir of Radun was an outstanding personality. Not only was he a great teacher, a foremost master of the Torah, but he loved his people like a father. And it was that paternal love which made him devote so much of his precious time to the writing of works of a deep religious fervor, harmoniously blended with a rare sweetness and mellowness, which will remain forever gems of our religio-ethical literature.

All that R. Meir says in the last chapter of the *Ethics of the Fathers* concerning him "who toils in the Torah for its own sake (*Lishmah*)" seems to have been realized in the great and saintly life of Rabbi Israel Meir. He who reads that chapter will see the life and work of the Hafetz Hayim mirrored and reflected. Need I say that this "life" is bound to become a source of noble incentive, a model and an inspiration to all Israel? Surely by its publication in English, Rabbi YOSHOR is rendering a signal service to Judaism in English-speaking countries.

ISAAC HERZOG, M.A., D. Litt.
Chief Rabbi of the Irish Free State.

PREFACE

SAINT AND SAGE, by Rabbi MOSES M. YOSHOR, is the faithful record of the life, work, and influence of one of the most saintly figures in our history—the late Rabbi Israel Meir HaCohen of Radun, for the past three generations one of the prime moulders, guardians and interpreters of the religious and moral genius of Israel.

Rabbi Israel Meir was a God-intoxicated personality, an acknowledged and beloved teacher, imbuing Israel with faith and loving kindness by precept and example. His harmonious life reveals him to us as a "*Cohen Gadol*", a crystalline figure of genuine purity and simplicity, of creative faith and optimism, of unbroken consistency of purpose and action—nearly a century of blessed life almost without a moment of weakness.

The spiritual grandeur of Rabbi Israel Meir is equally manifest and perpetuated in his writings. Both his deeds and his books made him a guiding star and compass on the stormy sea of Israel's life. His ethical and *halachic* works became the charts of the *derech ha-hayim*. His teachings were the clarion voice of his people's conscience. His blessed life was an open sacred book, a *Mishnah Berurah*. He was "a

living Torah", a symbol of the steadiness and effectiveness of traditional Judaism. Pure love of God and service of his fellowmen were the rhythms of every pulse-beat of his long life.

Small in stature, weighed down by the immense burden of his people's woes, Rabbi Israel Meir raised to an even higher level the religious life of his people throughout the world. He blazed new spiritual trails and relighted the moral horizon of Jewish idealism to a perplexed generation. He stood as an embodiment of all the attributes and virtues of the true *bassid*. In him all placed supreme confidence, from his life and teachings all drew solace and inspiration.

"The memory of the righteous is a blessing forever"—also in the sense that it often inspires us to claim their heritage, to integrate into our own lives some measure of their great faith, their moral fervor and discipline, their vision, grace, and serenity, their deep compassion, and all-embracing human sympathy and understanding.

Of inestimable value in this direction is Rabbi YOSHOR's appreciation of one of Israel's noblest sons and one of the chosen spirits of mankind. A perusal of his life-motives, of his lofty aspirations, thoughts and deeds, as set forth in sympathetic detail by SAINT AND SAGE, is a source of inner strength in our struggle for spiritual survival and in our quest for the eternal values of Israel and mankind.

BERNARD REVEL, Ph. D.
President, Yeshivah College.

INTRODUCTION

SAINTLINESS AND SCHOLARSHIP

Saintliness is the highest achievement in the endeavor for perfection. It is the ultimate goal of the soul in its yearning for salvation.

But its definition assumes a different character with almost every philosophy and belief. What may be interpreted as saintliness by one, is often repudiated by another, even sometimes held to be blasphemy. Christianity considers celibacy a supreme virtue and an indispensable means to holiness. Asceticism and the mortification of the flesh are likewise recommended by many denominations as a necessary antecedent toward the attainment of self-consecration.¹

Judaism, on the other hand, stands supreme in its emphatic condemnation of the celibate as well as of the extreme ascetic. It deprecates the notion that any force or faculty of human life be deemed unholy

1. Of the Christian philosophers whose ambition it was to attain to a greater excellence, Montaigne writes: "Some of them abandoned riches to exercise themselves in a voluntary poverty; others sought out labor and austerity of life to inure them to hardships and inconveniences; others deprived themselves of their dearest members, such as sight and their instruments of generation, lest their too delightful and effeminate service should soften and debase the stability of their souls" (Vol. II, ch. VI). It is well to remember that although the Reformation abolished in principle the medieval approval of asceticism, the mortification of the flesh still remains a Christian virtue, even a duty. See *Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia* on "Asceticism."

and therefore to be crushed. It says: "The saint doeth good to his soul, but he that troubleth his flesh, is cruel."² Commenting thereon, Rabbi Elijah, the *gaon* and saint of Wilna, declares: "Man's desires must be purified and idealized, but not done away with."

On the basis of the rabbinic dictum, "The ceremonial laws have been given for the purpose of refining and disciplining man through them," Maimonides also assails asceticism. He elaborates the principle of *via media*, or the golden mean, which, within the bounds set by the Torah, allows free play to every God-given faculty of both body and soul. He asserts that the general commandment of holiness was intended to guard man against excessive indulgence in animal desires and keep him from becoming a glutton or a drunkard; for, however sensuous an act may appear, so long as it is sublimated and devoted to the glory of God, it may lead man along the straight path of virtue and sanctity. Underlying the dietary and marriage laws, Maimonides likewise finds a legislative system intended to train the people in sobriety and holiness, which makes asceticism or monasticism superfluous.³

2. Proverbs XI, 17. Says the prophet: "God did not create the world for desolation but formed it for human habitation" (Isaiah XIV, 18). According to the sages no evil is devoid of good. Even the *Yetzer Hara* (evil inclination) is from God and is called *tov meod* (exceedingly good). He instituted it for the benefit of man and for the sake of His glory. The Midrash thus bids us remember the fundamental maxim: "If the passions did not exist, no man would ever build a house, engage in trade, take a woman in marriage, or beget children" (Gen. R. IX, 17).

3. See Maimonides, *Hilchoth Deoth*, I & II; *Guide to the Perplexed*, III, 12.

The ascetics that we meet now and then in Jewish history represent an entirely different type. Under sound and normal conditions asceticism never gained a foothold in Israel. Only when calamity befell the nation, when terrorism and corruption enveloped Jewish life, did asceticism make inroads upon the people.

Nevertheless, Jewish history knows of no religious groupings such as monastic orders. There were, to be sure, the ancient *Hassidim* (saints) during the pre-Maccabean age, the Nazarites, and the Essenes, during the last two centuries of the Second Temple. They, and later the Cabbalists (mystics), as well as the modern *Hassidim*, must never be classed with the monastic orders of other creeds. The overwhelming majority of their members, their teachers and leaders, did not endeavor to escape life; they lived, worked, and mingled daily with co-religionists outside their orders. To mention but one example, Rabbi Isaac Luria, the saintly head of the Cabbalists, in spite of his spiritual elevation, was constantly in touch with his family, and continued to provide for them throughout his life.

Hillel, in order to convince his disciples of man's duty toward his body, argued: "In the theatre or circus, the image of the king is washed, cleaned, and kept in good condition by those to whose care it is entrusted. How much more should man keep his body clean and comfortable, for he was made in the image of God, the King of the universe!" On an-

other occasion, Hillel called the body "the host of the guest, the soul, toward which it should act hospitably."

Only in exceptional cases, to curb wild desires and passions, was abstinence recommended by the Talmud.⁴ To quote Maimonides again: "Some pious individuals may adopt that mode of life in order to cure themselves of a tendency to the opposite extreme, as the physician endeavors to cure a person in whose body the mixture of the humors⁵ has lost its equilibrium and has caused disease. He stimulates the opposite extreme for a time, until the patient is cured and again able to follow the middle path."

Yet, however meritorious occasional fasting may prove to the chosen few and sometimes even to the multitude, excessive indulgence involves many a pitfall, and may lead man downward rather than upward. The sages declared him a sinner who afflicts himself by abstaining from food, drink, and other legitimate enjoyments.⁶ Instead, we are told that in the world to come man will have to give account for every enjoyment offered him in this life, as to whether it was employed with proper gratitude to the Giver.⁷

"It is a bad omen for one to despise the legitimate joys of life," declared a rabbi of old. "It is like

4. *Nazir* 4b; *Sifri* Num. 6.

5. The humors were formerly supposed to determine the temperament. Hippocrates believed that the human body contained four humors: blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile.

6. *Taan.* 11a.

7. *Yer. Kid.*, IV

unto a king, who has invited his servant to a banquet and in addition has presented him with a gracious gift. Yet in the midst of the banquet, the servant refuses to continue his repast with his royal host; and instead of showing gratitude, casts the gift at the king. Similarly, to decline the lawful enjoyments of life is as though one despised the abundant grace and bounty of the universal King.”⁸

The saintly Israel *Baal Shem Tov* asserted that to fast much and to lead an ascetic life is but a cunning device of Satan, who endeavors to confuse man in his efforts to serve God. Other leading *bassidic* authorities declared, “God loves the man who serves Him cheerfully with a serene disposition, rather than him who is consumed with grief and sadness and makes himself wretched by self-imposed suffering.”⁹

Even Rabbi Elijah, the *gaon* of Wilna, though opposed to the *bassidic* philosophy, remonstrated with his disciple, R. Zalman, against his wasting himself away by frequent fasts and nightly vigils. He pointed out that there are better ways leading to saintliness than fasting and asceticism, that true piety lies in the consecration of every gift and faculty, rather than in the extreme renunciation of that which is corporeal.

“But I understand the master himself lived somewhat such a life in his younger days,” Reb Zalman answered.

8. *Tana D'be Elijah*, 14.

9. *Beth Rabbi*; *Beth Aaron* 147a.

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9. *Beth Rabbi; Beth Aaron* 147a.

"True," said the *gaon*, "but I regret it deeply now, as I realize the blessings of other ways of life."

"I, too, would like to have something to regret," Reb Zalman smilingly answered.¹⁰

Another famous Jewish saint who was asked why he indulged in the luxury of fasting the first six days of the week, answered that he never meant to fast, but that he simply forgot to eat.

To be sure, wine is essential as a means of sanctification in greeting and ushering out the Sabbath and holy days.¹¹ It accompanies most of the sacred ceremonies in Jewish tradition. A cup of wine is usually used for the saying of grace as well as for prayers at circumcisions, weddings, and other occasions. The Biblical injunction during the holidays, "Ye shall rejoice before the Lord your God," has been interpreted to require the eating of meat and drinking of wine—for the sages assert: "There is no rejoicing without meat and no rejoicing without wine."

The institution of marriage was pronounced a means of sanctification and divine service. *Kiddushin* (sanctification) is the legal term for betrothal. "He who lives without a wife abides without joy, without bliss, without help, and without peace." He is also hindered in his efforts to attain holiness. Another sage said: "Man alone constitutes but one half of a person, and only by finding the other half is he

10. *Toledoth Adam*.

11. *Kiddush and Habdalah*.

consummated." Shakespeare paraphrased the same concept in his lines:

"He is the half part of a blessed man
Left to be finished by such as she;
And she a fair divided excellence,
Whose fullness of perfection lies in him." ¹²

It was felt that man's egotistic tendencies would undergo the first important stage in the process of humanization, by the training to live for others, for wife, for children, and for the future.

Thus, the high priest, in his supreme sanctity, was not permitted to represent his people in the performance of the holiest services of the year, in the Sanctum Sanctorum on *Yom Kippur*, unless he was married. Similarly, in the selection of a rabbi, a reader, or leader of a synagogue or community, preference has always been given the married man.

Judaism is a religion neither of gloom nor of merriment. True, sadness has its merits and advantages. He who is depressed and dejected is frequently more serious in his actions, more submissive and bending in his dealing with others. A man's dejection may improve his morale; make him examine his conduct, regret his mistakes, check his evil inclinations, and seek immunity from temptation. Whereas the overly mirthful soul is more easily tempted, and more exposed to the danger of losing himself spiritually.

On the other hand, "Serve the Eternal with glad-

12. *King Jobn*—Act III, Sec. II.

ness," is the exhortation of the psalmist. "The divine spirit," declare the sages, "does not rest upon him who is feeling unhappy." To the loyal Israelite, contentment of body is but a means leading to the soul's exaltation and felicity.

But while the Torah elevated the joy of the body to an ideal, in the same breath it warned against the abuse of joy, against the mad seeking of pleasures, and against leading a life of emptiness and frivolity.

The feasts and fasts of the Jewish calendar, the peculiar manner of their observance, illustrate the unique philosophy of Judaism. The awe-inspiring seriousness which the faithful Jew experiences while fasting, manifests itself also in his moments of rejoicing and feasting. The loyal Jew celebrates both his fasts and feasts with solemn devotion and contentment. "It is good that thou shouldst take hold of that, and that also from this withdraw not thy hand, for he that feareth God will come forth out of them all," states Ecclesiastes. The observant Jew recognizes the importance of both gladness and sadness, of joy and sorrow, for, if used in moderation, they were all meant for his good.

Hence we are commanded to indulge in feasting on the eve of *Yom Kippur* and in fasting immediately thereafter. While we are ordered to abstain from food, drink, and other pleasures on one occasion, it becomes mandatory to eat, drink, and rejoice on another. "He who feasts on the ninth day of *Tishri*

(*Yom Kippur* eve) is as though he fasted on both the ninth and the tenth days," says the Talmud.

The failure of many religious philosophies may be due—aside from their doubtful myths and superstitions—to the fact that each one of them chose but one principle of existence to the exclusion of the other. One adopted the Epicurean philosophy of joy, while the other exalted the lugubriousness of the cynics.¹³ Judaism owes its permanent freshness and vigor to its wise method of co-ordinating the diverse elements in human nature. It alone knows best how to merge the seemingly opposing forces harmoniously and make them function rhythmically.

To be sure, to effect a perfect moral equilibrium is only possible through a true knowledge of the Torah. Scholarship and intelligence are the essential guides toward saintliness. "The ignoramus cannot be a saint" (לא עם הארץ חסיד). Wisdom is hailed as superior even to prophecy (חכם עדיף מנביא).

Only through the road of true learning and its perfect translation into practice, does one become capable of reaching the summit of piety and sanctity.

The life of the saint is a reflection of the highest standard of excellence in the religious ideals of the people. "The true mind of a people at any time is best ascertained by examining that of its great men." Thus, in order to comprehend the hopes and en-

13. The Therapeutae (a heathen sect whose chief center was in Egypt), and the Greek Cynics with their renunciation of pleasures, marriage and property were the precursors of the Christian hermits.—*The Encyclopedia Britannica* on "Asceticism."

deavors of the Jew we must make a diligent study of the lives of his saints.

Jewish history is replete with great men whose teachings inspired and elevated their generations.

Though the present generation lags behind those of the past, it is, nevertheless, represented in the galaxy of scholarship and sainthood by the late *gaon* and *zaddik* Rabbi Israel Meir Kagan, better known as the Hafetz Hayim. He was an amazing phenomenon in this age of gross materialism and shallow-mindedness—a pure example of religious zeal and moral fortitude in a world idolizing vulgarity and irreligion. His soul-uplifting ideals gave the faithful a foothold in an environment overwhelmed with insipid truisms and dogmatic scepticism.

The Hafetz Hayim was not a hassidic *rebbe*, not even an ordained rabbi. He was in the habit of describing himself as a simple Jew, merely endeavoring to observe the *Shulchan Aruch* (Jewish Code of Laws). His uniqueness was even more strikingly evinced by his humility, and the plainness of his dress. Though he refused to the end of his life to accept the position of rabbi, yet for all practical purposes he was recognized as the leading spirit and supreme authority in Jewry. Moreover, his popularity was not confined to religious Jews only; he was liked and revered by all groups and classes. The service of God meant everything to him, and the joy of this service he deemed the greatest boon in life.

He did not lead a secluded life; on the contrary,

he traveled a great deal and mingled freely with the people. The austere rigor he demanded of himself was always accompanied by tenderness toward others. His sympathy with every human being, his readiness to assist and comfort the depressed, earned him the affection and veneration of all who knew him. His angelic face with its genial smile bore the stamp of a happy and hopeful disposition, which never forsook him, though his trials were not few. He was a perfect Jewish saint in the truest sense of the term.

He lived nearly one hundred years. Yet the creativeness of his genius, the excellence of his character, his magnanimity and purity of spirit gave the impression that he was a remnant of the saints of some glorious past, around whose virtues many folk tales are woven. Countless stories of his piety and righteousness sprang up in Jewish homes the world over.

In his appreciation of the Hafetz Hayim, the pre-eminent sage of our generation, R. Hayim Ozer Grodzensky, Chief Rabbi of Wilna, declared:

"Throughout the diaspora the Almighty in His infinite goodness and mercy provided our generations with great leaders, who were the guiding stars on the gloomy horizon of the *galuth*. Even the last generations, though lagging in their moral achievements behind those of the remote past, were blessed by Providence from time to time with prominent luminaries, who devoted their utmost to lead the people out of darkness. Their moral perfection, their profound

ingenuity, and noble character elevated their age to a high spiritual altitude. They looked like giants compared with their generations.

"Our own generation, though spiritually orphaned and almost without truly great men, has, however, been fortunate in having a few choice spirits. And one who was particularly distinguished and unexcelled in his greatness as a saint and sage, and whose splendid personality illuminated the world for almost a century, was the late *gaon* and *zaddik* Rabbi Israel Meir HaCohen. He was a relic of some remote age, whose equal could only be traced among the great saints of a bygone generation. He was revered by all people and acclaimed universally as a pure and holy person.

"He studied the Torah with a solemn devotion for its own sake, in consequence whereof he achieved the merited degrees described by our sages in *Aboth* (VI, 1). The hallowing and glorification of the divine name was the one desire around which he centered his whole being.

"God even bestowed upon him the distinction of authorship. He published great, holy, and precious works, which have been disseminated all over the world and have been accepted as standard text-books for individuals and groups, for rabbis and laymen.

"His entire life proved to be a long chain of scholarship, devotedness, and benevolence. Even in his hoary age, bent by years and frailties, he never hesitated to risk his life for the sake of his ideals.

"As human beings, we all seem to have our weak-

nesses. Our souls are susceptible to corruption and allured by the temptations of material desires and pleasures. But the Hafetz Hayim of blessed memory was immune from all that. Evil had no power over him.

"As long as this saint moved in our midst, our spirits were not fatherless. Alas, desolate, forsaken, and orphaned have we become since that crown was snatched off our heads!"

* * *

As a student of the famous Yeshivah in Radun during the years 1912-1915, the author had the good fortune of being in close contact with its renowned head, Rabbi Israel Meir HaCohen. He enjoyed the master's confidence on many an occasion, had free access to his personal correspondence, and was considered one of his household, thus having ample opportunity to observe and study this marvelous personality from all angles. It has since then been his ambition to accumulate all available data concerning the life and accomplishments of this unexcelled religious teacher.

In the July 1925 issue of *The Jewish Forum* the author published his first appreciation of the Hafetz Hayim. This was intended to serve as a nucleus for an elaborate biography. The relatives of the Hafetz Hayim were requested to gather all facts of interest concerning the saint. This, of course, had to be done without informing him, for the humbly disposed Hafetz Hayim desired to remain unknown to the

world at large. Indeed, none was more anxious to avoid publicity than he. He would not permit the exposure of his personality to the view and knowledge of the public, for in his modesty he deemed himself unable to fulfill the responsibilities which fame entails.

Apparently, due to some lack of precaution on the part of his relatives, the news leaked out and the plot, as he termed it, was disclosed to him. Thereupon the author received a written reprimand in which the sage expressed his sorrow over such an attempt. He pleaded that the enterprise be dropped, emphasizing that he would rather not be spoken of at all. Also that the publicity he had already acquired had been very much against his wishes. In conclusion, he quoted from the sages, "He who seeks to spread his name, loses his name."

In compliance with this entreaty, the writer was then compelled to interrupt his plans and defer his ambition. It was only after the passing of the *zaddik* that he resumed his task with even greater zeal. Inasmuch as nothing of a similar character had ever been attempted before, he encountered a virgin field, and found his enterprise most difficult.

However, through ceaseless efforts he has succeeded in accumulating the necessary information and in systematically compiling the important data.

The author has already received some spiritual compensation, thanks to the universal recognition of his portrayal of this hallowed personage. His

Rabin I. M. KAGAN

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ב"ה יום... לחדש אלול... תרס"ה

אל כבוד יפ"דו ה"ה ה"ה יפ"דו
ר"ה מ"ה מ"ה מ"ה מ"ה

ישראל מאיר הכהן

ט"ח

חפץ חיים' ומשנה ברורה'
ראדין, פלך ווילנא.



מבטא מ"ה ל"ה ת"ה ת"ה ת"ה ת"ה
י"ה ת"ה ת"ה ת"ה ת"ה ת"ה
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series of articles in the *Jewish Morning Journal* on the Hafetz Hayim have gained the approval of hundreds of thousands of readers the world over. His "The Life of the Hafetz Hayim" in Yiddish has been welcomed with praise by all shades of opinion.

At the same time he felt his goal would remain incomplete unless he prepared a similar volume for English-speaking Jews. Now that he has accomplished his task he is happy to present to them his painstaking work, which contains a biographical sketch and a resume of the ideal teachings of this great master.

The author wishes to express his deep gratitude to all who were helpful to him during the progress of this volume. He gratefully acknowledges the services of *The Jewish Forum*, of its editor Isaac Rosengarten, and former literary editor Rabbi Abraham Burstein who read the manuscript and offered invaluable criticism. Sincere thanks are due to Dr. Herbert Greenberg for preparing the Index; to Charles H. Schulman for constructive suggestions, and to Rabbi Dr. David S. Stern, a very dear friend, for his kind advice and encouragement. Likewise, he feels indebted to Dr. Isaac Herzog, former Chief Rabbi of the Irish Free State and now Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisrael, for his thoughtful Foreword; to Dr. Bernard Revel, president of *The Yeshivah College*, for his inspiring Preface, and to Dr. Leon Jung for his courteous note which the reader will find on page 273.

Kislav 15, 5697

M. M. Y.

Brooklyn, N. Y.

PART ONE

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ON

THE LIFE

OF

THE HAFETZ HAYIM

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CHAPTER I

BIRTH

The town of Zhetel in Lithu-Poland was small and inconspicuous. Its Jewish families, struggling for their livelihood amidst a not too friendly environment, knew the hand of persecution was ever ready to rise against them. Although poor in worldly possessions and despised by their neighbors, these brave tenders of the flame of Judaism still considered themselves amply compensated by their wealth of learning and knowledge of the Torah. In their little shops they trod the arduous paths of the commonplace; and as often as possible, they retired to their studies, which to them were the only true mark of distinction. In this little community lived the pious Reb Arye Zev Kagan with his wife Dobrusha. Reb Arye Zev traced his lineage from Aaron, the first high priest of Israel, down through the family of the famed Raphael HaCohen of Hamburg.¹ To the venerable Raphael, legend tells us, came Rabbi Elijah, *Gaon* of Wilna, to be redeemed. This saint, a first-born son, doubted whether the *cohen* his father had procured for his redemption, at the age of thirty

1. Renowned talmudist and author. Born November 4, 1722; died at Altona, November 26, 1803.

days, had truly possessed the rights of a priest; but of R. Raphael he had no doubt.

Reb Arye Zev's life did full justice to the heritage that had come down to him, wrapped in the sanctity of the ages. Meagre indeed was his share of goods and money. But great was the store of learning of this scholar who had studied under the *Gaon* Rabbi Hayim in the Yeshivah of Wolozhin. Private tutoring provided the small livelihood on which he barely managed to subsist. So justly did he deal with his fellowmen, so modestly and simply did he live, that all the community honored Reb Arye Zev.

Dobrusha, whom he had married in the year 1833 at the age of fourteen, after the death of his first wife, her sister, was a worthy spouse, at once pious in matters of religion and expert in household affairs. She conducted a small business so that her husband might spend most of his time at his studies. And she made the even greater sacrifice of permitting her husband to absent himself for long periods. He would travel to larger centers of learning, there to associate with the great authorities of his day, and steep himself wholly in the study of the Torah.

This virtuous woman lived by the laws of God and prayed daily that He send her a son. On the sixth of February, 1838, corresponding to the eleventh day of *Shebat* 5598,² her prayers were answered. In

2. *The Russian Jewish Encyclopedia* makes the year 1833; other sources give the year 1835. According to *The New York Times* (Sept. 16, 1933) he was 105 years old when he died.

the birth of her first child she saw the fulfillment of her hopes and dreams. This son would perpetuate the traditions of the family. He would shine as a scholar of the Talmud. He would be upright in his conduct toward God and toward man.

On the thirteenth day of February the circumcision ceremony took place. The important members of the Jewish community of Zhetel came to the elaborate feast. The man honored with the blessing recited over his cup of wine, "And his name shall be called in the midst of Israel . . ." He paused and turned to Reb Arye Zev. For just a second there was silence. And then proudly and gladly, "Israel Meir!" the father exclaimed.

In customary fashion the guests crowded about to offer congratulations. But the very learned and pious saw added significance in this name. "May he grow up," they prayed, "to realize the true meaning of his name. May he indeed become a light in Israel." The little infant whimpered and wrinkled his very red forehead. Reb Arye Zev stood straight and proud. The face of Dobrusha shone happily. And the assembly answered, "Amen."

CHAPTER II CHILDHOOD

"What is the best *Sechorah*?
My baby will learn Torah;
Seforim he will write for me
And a pious Jew he will always be."

So Jewish mothers in Poland and Lithuania chant as they put their children to sleep. And so the good Dobrusha sang as she rocked her first-born son back and forth on her knees. The baby cooed and lay quiet; and his grateful mother read in his eyes a promise that her prayers would be fulfilled.

With exceptional care the parents watched over this child. They taught him early at home and sent him to *Heder* (religious school) by the time he was four years old. It was a most propitious beginning, and young Israel Meir made the most of it. Soon he knew more than the older lads in his classes. And almost as soon, the teacher regretfully announced that he would have to give up his favorite pupil. The boy was sent to a school of higher learning.

Always, in or out of school, he had the goodness and simplicity which were to characterize him throughout life. To his friends he was the exemplar of human kindness. Once his companions noticed

some apples scattered near the fruit stand of an old woman. The youngsters were hungry after a tedious day in school. They picked up the fruit and ate it. And the next day young Israel Meir studied the Ten Commandments. The little boy stood gravely at his father's side, solemnly repeating the command, "Thou shalt not steal." He learnt that merely to desire another's possessions was in itself a sin. Quietly he asked his mother for a few pennies. He went to the old woman, paid for a measure of apples, emptied the fruit back into her basket, and hurried off before she had a chance to protest.

The boy performed many deeds of kindness, asking no thanks and wanting no praise or attention. His father took him to a great rabbi in Wilna. Israel Meir answered sweetly and simply as the learned man examined him. He displayed none of the arrogance and ostentation which might have been natural for a child so singled out. The rabbi, touched by the child's naivete, called him to his desk, placed his hands on his shoulders, and spoke: "Remember, my dear child, always to retain the dignity of your name."

It was with joy that Reb Arye Zev brought his son back to his boarding house after the interview. Israel Meir's eyes filled drowsily and he fell asleep over the Talmud he had begun to study. His father carried him to bed, covered him with a blanket, and left the room. When he returned a little later, the bed was empty, while outside the window the full moon seemed to wink knowingly at this fine trick that had

been played on Reb Arye Zev. For there in a corner, quite absorbed, the little boy sat again, still studying.

But the happy father was not long destined to watch his son's progress. When Israel Meir was only ten, his father took mortally ill. As he lay on his death bed, pale and fevered, his thoughts were not for himself. It was, rather, over the training of his son that he worried. Very faintly, as he breathed his last,¹ Reb Arye Zev prayed that the Almighty, the Father of orphans, complete the task begun by himself.

His death left Dobrusha poorer than ever. Her small share was sadly inadequate. Yet like a zealous

1. Reb Arye Zev was born in the year 1802 and died on the 24th day of Tishri in the year 1848. That year is particularly remembered by Jews of Wilna due to the cholera epidemic which raged there.

A fortnight before, on the eve of Yom Kippur, after having consulted a number of physicians, the great saint and scholar, Rabbi Israel Salanter, (who served there in the capacity of Rosh Yeshivah) became convinced that fasting would prove fatal.

He therefore urged the Rabbis of Wilna to issue dispensation from fasting on the Day of Atonement. When many of them opposed his views, Reb Israel resolved to take the initiative and assume the responsibility.

On the eve of Yom Kippur he caused announcements to be affixed in all synagogues advising the people not to indulge in too many prayers, and to do away with fasting on the following day. But the people hesitated to follow his written advice. On the morning of Yom Kippur, during the services when the congregation was at the height of its solemnity, Rabbi Salanter ascended the pulpit, produced some cake and wine, pronounced the blessing over them and ate and drank before the congregants, whom he begged to follow his example.

The plague subsided soon after. But Reb Arye Zev fell a victim to the ravaging scourge.

(See L. Ginsberg's *Students, Saints and Scholars*, p. 185. His version is similar to that related by the Hafetz Hayim. See also D. Frishman's narrative "*Sh'losbo Sh'ochlu K'echod*" and S. Rosenfeld's *R. Israel Salanter*. J. Mark's version in his "*Die G'dolim*" from *Unzer Zeit*, p. 76, is unverifiable.)

watchman, she guarded her precious jewel. Her dresses might be patched and faded, her meals reduced to meagre bread and pottage, her days be long and weary; but her son would go on with his learning. Under no circumstances would she allow the interruption of his education. Her tired face beamed with pride and pleasure as the elders of the community would murmur to each other, "Ah yes, young Israel Meir is indeed a little genius."

Yet his head was not made dizzy by the praise he received. He kept to his path of simple kindness. His heart invariably turned to those who needed help. Now it was a poor water carrier, whom mischievous youngsters tormented. On frosty winter evenings, the boys coming from *Heder* used to fill the man's pails with water. And in the morning, when he came to draw from the well, they were frozen to the ground. The poor wretch, struggling to clear off the ice, would shake his bony fingers and mutter dire curses against the troublemakers. Israel Meir heard of their pranks. He would wait every night while the youngsters went through their ritual. Then, calmly, he emptied the pails so that the poor man would have no trouble.

CHAPTER III

BOYHOOD

Judah L. Gordon had drawn a lovely a poetic picture of youngsters crowding the roads to the famous yeshivoth, when the new term is just beginning. On their backs they carry only knapsacks. Behind them they leave the possessions of former days. Quite forgotten is the outside world, with the pleasures it may offer. For theirs is the sole desire to study the Torah. With joyous, uplifted hearts they obey the words of the sages, "Exile thyself to a place of learning."¹

Israel Meir had been studying under his oldest half brother, Reb Aaron, an excellent scholar. But now the young pupil, like his brethren of the poem, also desired to exile himself to a place of learning. Like them he too went forth, first to the yeshivah of Grodno, and then to the one at Slonim. Though Israel Meir was young and poor, he experienced but little hardship. Teachers and older colleagues soon recognized that there was unusual worth in this young boy.

At the age of thirteen, on becoming *Bar Mitzvah*, duly admitted to the ranks of Israel's manhood, the boy more than ever wished to follow in the footsteps

1. *Aboth* IV, 18.

of his father. The late Reb Arye Zev had studied and been buried in Wilna, which city, the so-called "Jerusalem of Lithuania," famed throughout the world for its men of piety and wisdom, beckoned invitingly to the young scholar. Here indeed, where every synagogue harbored a yeshivah, where students were encouraged and supported, he saw a haven of learning.

Israel Meir's longings were fulfilled. The unselfish Dobrusha had married again—this time a prominent citizen of Radun—solely that her only child might continue with his studies. But the boy did not depend long on his mother's support. His father's friends welcomed him with open arms at Wilna, while one of the city's prominent scholars, Rabbi Israel Gordon, wished to provide this bright boy, in whom he saw much promise, with shelter and the necessities of life. However, Israel Meir, at thirteen, already had bound himself to the principle to accept only that which he earned. "He who hates gifts shall live,"² he had read in the Proverbs. This was his motto now and forever after. Rabbi Gordon, privately pleased at this added manifestation of steadfast piety, arranged for Israel Meir to assist his son in his studies. It was a splendid opportunity for the young scholar, who now had the rabbi's extensive library at his disposal. He tasted joyously of its treasures. Not only in the realm of literature did

2. Prov. XV, 27.

Israel Meir benefit from his new home; here he met the renowned scholar Rabbi Jacob Barit, to whose learned talmudic discourses the boy now was admitted. His young mind stood out freshly among the older, more venerable men with whom he studied.

Yet his path, for all the aids which helpful teachers offered, was by no means one of ease. The *Haskalah* movement, with its reform tendencies, was then making inroads upon traditional Judaism. Through the hoary citadels of tradition, gleams from this new so-called Enlightenment did their best to filter in. The glories of secular education, the prospects of gaining political equality and economic advancement appeared very enticing to the poor yeshivah student. The city of Wilna, the home of such men as A. B. Levinson and M. Ginzberg, quite naturally became the main centers of the *Haskalah*. Soon the fame of Israel Meir had spread outside the narrow circle of his yeshivah. And Levinson and his companions made more than one attempt to wrest this young scholar from his school.

It would have been, for the average youth, no small temptation. On one side gleamed the ease of acquiescence, the pleasant steps up the comfortable ladder of economic gain and security. On the other were the hardships, the struggles, the lack of reward for a life devoted to the principles of truth and piety and goodness. But for Israel Meir the choice was easily made. It was, as the *Haskalah* devotees soon discovered, futile to try to shake him from his faith.

He would not stoop to dig breaches in his holy walls of tradition. And so the bright visions of ease and compromise could lure him not at all.¹

1. Though of his own person the Hafetz Hayim himself spoke very seldom, he used, however, to tell much about his former colleagues, of which the following is an example. There was then in their group a student known as Shlomele Masmid (diligent student), who later became the renowned Rabbi Shlome HaCohen of Wilna (1831-1906). At the age of fourteen Shlomele became seriously ill. His physicians advised the boy to give up studying, admonishing him that continuation would prove fatal. Shlomele, however, would not forsake his studies. His argument was: "If I cease studying, I shall not be able to endure it, and if I study, I am likewise warned that I shall die. Better then, to die from studying than from not studying." Such were the pupils of Rabbi Barit.

CHAPTER IV

MARRIAGE

For Jews of the middle nineteenth century, early marriages were still the custom of the day. In a time of restriction and oppression, when clouds of affliction hovered menacingly over them, these were a bright spot in an otherwise sombre existence. While poverty stood grim without, while hostile authorities curtailed intellectual development in the secular world, these marriages helped to guard that which was healthy and sacred in Jewish life. With well-to-do parents a prime ambition was to provide for their daughters students of promising genius. The young scholar, being amply provided for, could then dedicate himself wholly to the study of the Torah. A scholarly son-in-law was considered the best passport to the higher stations of life. It was only natural that Israel Meir, on attaining marriageable age, be sought after by scores of families as a match for their daughters. They held out dowries and comfortable subsistences. Yet the young man who so well could have used these gifts, dismissed them peremptorily. He turned an indifferent ear to the pleas of his mother and his older brother Reb Aaron, who wished him to marry a wealthy girl of noble and prominent fam-

ily. The fortune her father proffered was stupendous. But the fate which Providence held out was even more important.

Reb Shimon, Dobrusha's second husband, had a daughter Frieda, of his first wife. He persisted in his dream of seeing the girl married to his distinguished step-son. To Dobrusha, however, this match appeared in not so favorable a light. Frieda was many years older than her son; Frieda's dowry was not great; Frieda had other disadvantages. So she and her husband argued, quarreled over the problem. Israel Meir himself, meanwhile, continued absorbed in his studies, quite unconscious of the turbulent storm which he had created unawares.

Reb Shimon came to Wilna one fine morning for purposes of business. He persuaded Israel Meir to visit his mother, at which instance the young man saw for the first time the tempest he had caused. Unhesitatingly, he came to her and begged that she approve the match with Frieda. He made it clear that he had definitely decided not to marry a girl for money. Frieda might have some disadvantages—of looks, or age, or position. But by virtue of her good character, pious soul, and nobility of heart, she far excelled other maidens. Besides, he added, he could not bear to have his mother's happiness wrecked on his account.

The mother, impressed by his very obvious sincerity, nodded approval and gave her son her blessing.

The waters of family life once more flowed tranquilly. A date was set for the engagement.

Only in one small area did storms still rage. When Reb Aaron, in Zhetel, received an invitation to attend the engagement party, he waxed furious. As presumed guardian of his younger brother, he rushed to Radun with the intention of preventing the engagement. But on his way Reb Aaron met with an accident that held him up till after the party—at which time, though he still tried to break up the alliance, all his efforts went to naught. The youthful groom, arguing that it would be a grave sin to break the innocent girl's heart, insisted on his rights and privileges. In Reb Aaron's accident he saw the hand of an intervening Providence which had determined on this marriage, for according to the sages, "Matrimonial alliances are concluded in heaven." In the winter of the year 1855, at the age of seventeen, Israel Meir was married.

CHAPTER V

THE SIMPLE LIFE

In the small, placid town of Radun, Israel Meir settled with his wife. The Radun of almost a hundred years ago was backward and provincial and quite devoid of intellectual attributes. It lay far from the nearest railroad; and having received very little from nature or from science, it offered not much more to its peasants and Jewish families. For Israel Meir, this sleepy community must have been a far cry from the Wilna of his youth. Here one found only the poor and uneducated, engrossed in their tedious striving for daily bread. Here, among the hard-worked corn fields, the swampy plains and the tiny unalluring shops, began an existence that could offer little time or opportunity for cultural expression.

A man, says tradition, is known by his place. But there was to be an exception in this little Polish town. For here the place became known by the man; the unloveliness of poverty and struggle for subsistence was to be quite eclipsed by the radiance of Israel Meir. The chance of becoming a great rabbi, of leaving the uninspiring environment in Radun for a larger, more important city, continually offered it-

self to the famous scholar. His eager family urged him to accept. But Israel Meir preferred the simple life. "Our sages," he explained to his wife, "would not have advised men to shun the rabbinate, were being a rabbi wholly advantageous."

Frieda shrugged her shoulders and pointed out the comfortable livelihoods that usually went with the rabbinical position. Her husband replied from the *Ethics of the Fathers*: "Make not the Torah a crown wherewith to aggrandize thyself, nor a spade wherewith to dig." That was all. Frieda smiled and was content.

To gain a living they opened a grocery store, with Frieda taking charge so that her husband might devote himself to study. For a few hours on every market day he left his books to help in the business. It became apparent, as trade flourished, that this good man's deeds of kindness had not passed unnoticed. From nearby villages, from the Gentile peasants as well as the Jewish tradespeople, from all of Radun and its marshy fields, the people flocked to buy from Israel Meir. They knew of no better way, these crude, well-meaning folk, to show their love for the scholar who lived among them. For a while goods passed over the counter with profitable rapidity till one evening, as Frieda looked approvingly over her long list of accounts, her husband came from his study. "I am afraid," he began, "that our success is causing other grocers to lose their business." He

shook his head in displeasure. "We cannot deprive another of his livelihood!"

The good Frieda sighed. Without a word, she closed the front doors; hereafter their field of business would be limited to immediate neighbors. Israel Meir would accept no tokens of thanks—even though they came in the form of payment for eggs and flour—for all his deeds of goodness.

Always he was scrupulously exact about business transactions. Coming into the store one evening, he found a fish on the counter which a peasant had evidently left by error. Frieda wrinkled her forehead, but could not remember which poor man had forgotten the bundle. Israel Meir, much perturbed, made futile attempts to find the customer, while through his head ran the familiar commandment, "Thou shalt not steal." In order to avoid the faintest violation of this principle, on the next market day he distributed a fish to every one of his many peasant customers.

It was unfortunate, but inevitable, that as a result of his endeavor to sell fine merchandise at a minimum profit, his insistence upon giving each customer a too generous overweight, his conscientious scruples and unremitting uprightness, Israel Meir could not flourish long in the difficult realm of business.

For a long time, Raduner householders (*baalei batim*) had pleaded with Israel Meir to become their official rabbi. He had stood out against their petitions.

Finally, however, the dearly beloved man relented, accepting the position only on three conditions: first, that his decisions in religious matters be accepted by all of them; second, that they forgive possible mistakes in judgment, and take no insult; and third, that he receive no salary from the community. This last condition, as we might suspect, the not overly-affluent town accepted with little reluctance. For a short time Israel Meir remained their rabbi. But there came a legal suit in which one litigant refused to accept the judgment rendered by the rabbi in accordance with Jewish law. The first condition having been broken, Israel Meir resigned and turned in his first and last contract as a rabbi.

Having been stationed at a counter and a pulpit, Israel Meir now remained engrossed in books alone, and became a tutor of grown boys. Once again poverty loomed before him. Friends and admirers offered him various help. Empty shelves and pocketbooks, however, could not shake Israel Meir from his determination to accept no gifts. He, who by the very meaning of his name was destined to desire life, (*Hafetz Hayim*) could not disregard the Scriptural exhortation, "He who hateth gifts shall live."¹ Even Dobrusha came to plead with her son on this prosaic but useful subject of money. "Do you really think," she asked, "you ought to turn down the generous offers of so many good friends?"

1. Proverbs XV, 27.

Then, with keen insight into the altruism of many so-called philanthropists, he answered. "Do you know, mother, why they beg me so anxiously to take their gifts? Only because of my persistent reluctance to accept. If I were willing to take it, they would have hesitated twice before offering me their support."

Though his stomach was not too well nourished, his mind did not lack for nutrition. Eventually he became an authority in biblical, talmudical, and post-rabbinical literature; he fully comprehended the significance of the moral doctrines and ethical principles expounded therein; and he was vitally aware how indispensable they were to human life and happiness.

During the years 1864-1869 Israel Meir served in the capacity of a Talmud instructor (*Rosh Yeshivah*), first in Minsk and then in the near-by town of Washilishok, while Frieda kept up the house. She had a cow, a solitary staff for financial support which she had bought on her husband's recommendation. "But be careful, my dear wife," he had written with his usual solicitude, "to get a cow without horns so it cannot hurt anyone, and do not let her go out by herself."²

There is an interesting tale about him as he prepared to go home for one of the Passover holidays.

2. The Gentile peasants so loved him that they frequently drove his cow on to their corn fields. There they demanded that he himself come to redeem her. For in their crude adoration, they believed that his steps on their grounds would bring them blessing.

Word reached him of a poor orphan bride whose engagement was about to be broken, since her relatives had failed to make good the dowry they promised. The good rabbi could hardly afford to interfere; but he could not let the emergency pass unnoticed. He gave the bride his savings of the season, so that he had to borrow train fare to get home.

As Frieda set her table for the Seder, she heard of her husband's unwonted generosity. She smoothed down the frayed white linen table cloth, arranged the matzoth, wine, and other articles, and gave the spotless house one final feminine whisk with her cloth. Then she smiled in satisfaction. She, it was true, was poor and deprived even of the necessities of life. But it was infinitely more important that one young girl had been saved from heartbreak and shame.

CHAPTER. VI

AUTHOR

Rabbi Israel Meir might always have remained obscure, and his fame confined within local bounds as a humble instructor of the Talmud. Only there were evil, tale-bearing and slander in the society around him. And it was just these failings, oddly enough, which were to cause the precious radiance of fame to shine upon him.

From early youth, he had thrilled to the words of the psalmist: "Who is the man who desireth life and loveth days to enjoy happiness? Keep thy tongue from evil and thy lips from speaking guile."¹ While yet a student, upon returning to Wilna from a visit to his mother, he had been asked by his teacher, Rabbi Jacob Barit, for information regarding the vacant rabbinical post in Radun. The problem of filling the vacancy had caused much friction and created two parties, each contending for its candidate. So Israel Meir asked to be excused from making any statement, due to the fact that he had taken upon himself not to talk evil about others. His tongue, indeed, had been free from speaking guile. But for the well-meaning teacher at Minsk or Washilishok this was

1. Psalms XXXIV. 13, 14.

not enough. He wanted to inspire a similar rule of conduct in those who lived around him. And he wrote the *Hafetz Hayim*,² the book by whose name he became known. An honest and worthwhile study this, aimed at the prolific bearers of evil tales. His was not the attitude of the preacher, moral, self-righteous—and ineffective. It was rather a legal attitude, calculated at once to gain respect and achieve its point. He shows that speech is the most precious gift that Providence has seen fit to bestow upon man. It is the wings by which man's mind may be uplifted and his heart ennobled. It is the faculty which, when properly cultivated, will raise man to pre-eminence over the animal. But he shows, too, how this gift has been abused and desecrated by all too many of its recipients. They have taken their heritage of speech and twisted it into patterns of calumny, slander and gossip, and have thus laid the basis for most human evil.

Throughout the development of Jewish thought, Israel's scholars and saints have warned against defilement of the tongue. And "Very often," says Rabbi Israel Meir, in keeping with this tradition, "an evil statement injurious to one's neighbor might easily result in a violation of fourteen positive and seventeen prohibitive commandments of the Torah."³ Even this dire consequence is not all. For quoting from the Talmud, he points out that in a moral sense

2. Published in the year 1873—first edition.

3. See *M'Kor Hayim* or introduction to *Hafetz Hayim*.

slander is equal to idolatry, adultery and murder. And rather than commit any of them, an Israelite when forced must forfeit his life. Moreover, a tale-bearing tongue convicts itself, the slandered one, and him who listens to the slander. It is an act that a giant might envy, slaying three men with one blow.

In the modesty which exemplified him, the venerable author omitted his name from the title page. The many admirers of the book were left free to wonder who it was that had so profitably instructed them on the noble use of the tongue. Rabbi Israel Meir was free to travel in the humble incognito he desired. As his own *meshulach*, he went from city to city to sell his book. Always, when he came to a town, he would enter the synagogue, seat himself on the back bench among the poor, and draw his simple black *kaftan* around him in an inconspicuous manner. He very carefully explained he was but the representative of the author, who preferred to remain unknown.

"He who runs from honor," say our sages, "is soon sought by it."⁴ Rabbi Israel Meir might omit his name from the title page, where it justly belonged. He might act the part of *meshulach*. He might seek to walk in the shadows when the world wished to grant him the limelight. But fame has sundry ways of finding out those she would honor. It was through a trifling incident that Rabbi Israel Meir finally had to acknowledge the glory he deserved.

4. *Tanchuma* Levit, IV; *Erubin* 13b.

Coming to the city of Kovno, he remained in the synagogue during the night to continue his studies. There he noticed a poor man, stretched on a bare bench beside him. Simply and quietly, Rabbi Israel Meir took off his own coat to lay it under the head of his less fortunate neighbor. Then he returned to his books. So they found him when they came for morning services, without a coat, wholly absorbed in his studies. But about Rabbi Israel Meir at this point there was none of the look of the ordinary *mesbulach*. A little investigation established the identity of the modest scholar. Thus, through an act of simple kindness, the author of the *Hafetz Hayim* was revealed to the people of Kovno. Henceforth, the world preferred to call him by that title.

But it was not only to the people of Kovno that the genius of the Hafetz Hayim disclosed itself. The father of the late Rabbi Kook of Palestine told how he too discovered the identity of the plain traveler, who had come to the city with his book. It was his honesty in transacting business that convinced the onlooker that here was no ordinary *mesbulach*. It was already evident, from the encomia (*haskamoth*) of great rabbis on the first pages of the book that the author of *Hafetz Hayim* was a *cohen*. Seeking to confirm their suspicions, the *shamash* called the stranger for the first reading of the Torah. There could then no longer be any doubt that the unassuming *mesbulach* was himself the author. They gathered around him eagerly after the services. He hesitated

to pronounce an untruth when asked if he were the author. But he added that much of the work had been done by his associates. That afternoon, he disappeared from the town . . .

Men read the book and praised it. And its author continued as the living exemplification of his writings. Thus we see him one wintry Friday morning unable to reach his destination before noon. It was against his rule to travel anywhere on Friday afternoon, in view of the approaching Sabbath. He was stranded at a roadside inn with drivers and cattle dealers and other plain men who had similarly been detained.

During the Sabbath, the simple folk indulged in typical country conversation. They talked of a new-born colt, or fields for the cattle, of sheep to be shorn. Rabbi Israel Meir, in his room, continued with his studies, despite the noisy pastoral discussions without.

When the Sabbath had passed, the innkeeper came up to apologize to his guest. He was sorry for the tumult. The great author must have been badly inconvenienced. He hoped—but the rabbi interrupted him. "On the contrary," he insisted, "this was an ideal crowd. Talking so much, busy the whole day, and yet not uttering one word of evil against man! Imagine. Such simple folk preferred to confine their day's conversation to the domain of animals rather than humans."

But it was not only with a country innkeeper

that the Hafetz Hayim could show his pacific judgment. A disciple complained to him about what he considered the ineffectiveness of his sermons. "I preach sometimes for two hours to my congregation," he declared, "and don't seem to improve their morals at all."

The Hafetz Hayim smiled placidly, and quoted from the *Midrash*. "For each and every second that a man keeps silent abstaining from evil talk, he will enjoy supernal light in the Hereafter." Then he shrewdly continued, "If such a treasure is promised for only one second's silence, imagine the reward in store for you for keeping an audience silent for two hours. Think how much evil, calumny, and tale-bearing you are instrumental in averting. Do you expect any greater compensation?"

5. *Shemiratb Halashon* I, 11.

CHAPTER VII

RADUN YESHIVAH

Providence must have rejoiced on the day when the Hafetz Hayim founded his Yeshivah in Radun. And the angels who watch human destiny must have exulted in joyous anticipation, as thousands of scholars would also have been gladdened had they known the privileges in store for them. For a long time the Hafetz Hayim had contemplated this institution. He had strolled down the narrow dirt roads in and out of Radun, visualizing the scholars who might learn to live and love life as he did. He pictured young boys studying, carrying books, arguing over the interpretation of an intricate verse of the Talmud. In 1869 the dream came true. *The Yeshivah Hafetz Hayim* was born, proudly and defiantly overlooking the swamp lands. No architect would have breathed a sigh of envy on gazing at the rude remodeled synagogue, with its unadorned walls and ceilings. But the Hafetz Hayim looked upon its plainly fashioned rooms with love and hope. The humble yeshivah grew till its light spread over all of Europe, and its influence permeated every corner of the world. Here, where he could hide from fame and the public, and yet extend his teachings to distant realms, the Hafetz

Hayim loved to pass his days. It at once opened the door for his influence to spread, and closed it to unwanted publicity. The students not only studied the Talmud and its code the *Shulchan Aruch* as exercises in mental discipline. They lived under the guidance of one who was a veritable *Shulchan Aruch* himself. In him they saw the embodiment of his teachings, the personification of all that was good, true and noble. They learned to translate into their own lives the principles studied in their books; they acquired the invaluable habit of transposing ethical codes from literature into life.

According to the usual custom, the Hafetz Hayim might have sat back comfortably in his study and let others worry about the funds. He might have sent out emissaries to look for financial aid. But on himself, he decided, should fall the worry as well as the honor. Again Rabbi Israel Meir became his own *mesbulach*. This time he was to sell only an idea—the excellent plan of guiding young lives along paths of knowledge and virtue. In his long black *kaftan*, with a little velvet cap resting above his skull cap, he traveled from city to city, seeking funds for his yeshivah; while for himself he accepted not a penny. His own books, which, in his customary negligence of modern rules of business, he sold at a minimum rate, afforded him but a meagre livelihood. But even when a grateful public wished to pay him more, the Hafetz Hayim refused. From Lord Rothschild of Frankfurt came a draft of three hundred francs in

payment for a set of his works. The Hafetz Hayim deducted some thirty odd francs covering his set price, and scrupulously returned the remainder. In a letter he explained that he only would accept the money due him; if, however, the philanthropist desired, he might donate the difference to his Radun yeshivah. Lord Rothschild, who was hardly accustomed to this manner of financial dealing, read this astounding communication in amazement. He forwarded an increased amount to the Hafetz Hayim for his academy.

The Yeshivah flourished for a while, helped by the work of its founder, for whom no source was too great or too small from which to seek help. In the Radun synagogue custom and necessity had decreed that the sexton collect contributions at the close of daily services, one half to go to the synagogue and the other to the Yeshivah. But these daily solicitations did not strike the same joyous chords in the hearts of all who were present. For a group of students came to the Hafetz Hayim one day, flushed and excited. Their spokesman was a proud youth, who made up in brains and spirit for what he lacked in food and clothes. "It's bad enough, rabbi," he complained, "for you to solicit funds for us at other towns, but you can hardly expect us to endure the ignominy of seeing people give for us as we sit and watch."

Their teacher replied. "Your objection, my children, is unreasonable. You well know that it is

the duty of every Jew to procure his share in the Torah. But not everyone is so fortunate as yourselves, to receive his share in a direct manner. Those who by day are absorbed in manual labor must depend upon other means. Would you then deprive them of their sole method of acquiring their portion, by withdrawing the opportunity to purchase it with their poor pennies?" Their boyish pride melted before his speech. This was an altogether novel and more pleasant way of looking at the matter, a real altruistic standpoint.

With the money collected, the Yeshivah bought its books, fed and clothed its scholars. The wife of the Hafetz Hayim organized a public kitchen, where she and her two daughters, Gitel and Sarah, cooked free meals for the boys. "You may be feeding their minds," the good woman would laugh at her husband, "I am feeding their stomachs."

But he also was concerned about the physical welfare of his students. Coming into the Yeshivah one afternoon, the Hafetz Hayim saw a new student quite engrossed in his studies. On his shoes was the dust of a road which must have stretched for many miles outside of Radun. The rabbi looked with solicitous eyes at this boy, who had gone right to his books, stopping neither for food nor rest. Then he fetched bread and soup, placed it near the stranger, and walked quietly away. A few minutes later he returned and murmured, as though in surprise, "Why, here is good food getting cold. I imagine it

must be for you." The boy looked up in amazement. Suddenly he realized that a plate of soup would facilitate the studying of another portion from the *Gemorrah*. And the boy and the Hafetz Hayim were content.

Since the scholars of the "Hafetz Hayim Yeshivah" could not express their thanks to their master by means of material objects, they offered it in terms of love and veneration. They wholeheartedly adored their teacher, whose every thought and action was directed in their interest. Those who were present will long remember a particularly jolly Purim, when one of the more ingenious students disguised himself as head of the Yeshivah, and in pompous tones declared himself ready to answer questions. "All right, then," a youth called out, full of Purim cake and Purim gusto, "why is Radun so marshy and muddy?"

The audience chuckled as the pseudo-sage raised his hand weakly. "A very profound question, very profound," he replied. "You are lucky to have before you one so great as your teacher to give the proper answer. You know, as the Talmud says, that God endowed Adam with the power of viewing forthcoming generations and their leaders. When Adam heard that the great *gaon* and *zaddik* Israel Meir would some day dwell in Radun, he was very angry. To him it was unthinkable that so wretched a place should harbor so fine a master. In his fury, he expectorated. Considering his gigantic girth, which

extended from one end of the earth to the other, his sputum resulted in all this marsh and mud."

But still the questioner was not satisfied. "Considering Adam's great size," he ventured, "you'd think he could spit enough to form an ocean, or at any rate, a lake."

The disguised teacher reassured them. "You may be sure," he said, "that the flood was checked by the Hafetz Hayim's virtues." The boys cheered uproariously.

Many Purims passed, and generations of scholars followed one another, till fate once more broke in upon them in 1914. The Hafetz Hayim was forced to send *meshulachim* throughout the Jewish communities. For a long time his Yeshivah, as well as many others, relied upon the generosity of American Jewry. From the Central Relief or Joint Distribution Committee came support for thousands of Jewish schools, which were thus saved from utter annihilation.

But even this could not last. While Americans were still serenely bathing in prosperity, while factories hummed with activity, while only the vaguest undertones of discontent hinted that Utopia had not at last been found, the Hafetz Hayim saw that the bubble must break. As early as 1924, when the figures on the ticker tape seemed to be defying the quaint notion that everything which goes up must come down, he was instrumental in organizing the *Vaad HaYeshivoth*, with headquarters in Wilna. This Federation had for its objective the support of

all the yeshivoth in Eastern Europe. A tax was levied upon every faithful Jew in Poland. It was a wise and useful gesture. For when the depression came, when poverty and hunger walking their own streets caused Americans to forget that the Jews in Eastern Europe still sadly needed funds, the yeshivoth were saved from calamity.

With his departure, the *Vaad* has lost its main support. The Yeshivah at Radun, most beloved offspring of Rabbi Israel Meir, has suffered along with the rest. Though even in pre-war days it never had sufficient funds to assure its students of regular meals, now its weekly stipends still more are scant and meagre. The students must struggle with privation in their learning. Knowledge is plentiful, though money is not, in the Radun Yeshivah, where very literally the students have fulfilled the famous Talmudic injunction, "And wouldst thou know the law, then must thou eat a morsel of bread dipped in salt, drink water sparingly, sleep on the ground, and live a life of tribulation, while thou toilest in the Torah."

And so they sit, or stand, there chanting:

"*Oi, oi, omar rabba, oi, oi tannu rabanan*"—

(Backward and forward, swaying, he repeats
With ceaseless singsong these undying words).

"The mighty Torah, the immortal light,
Has always sought dark corners for itself.
From the wombs of darkness, to the light of day,
Successive generations bring her forth,

A heritage beneath the hand of God.
Like thieves in attics, or in cellars gathered,
Our sons have studied the forbidden Torah,
And glories inextinguishably bright
Have issued from these cellars
While a people's saints and leaders have come down.

"Dear to the Torah is a life of sorrow,
And in the chastity of poverty
The people and its sons have kept their faith.

"Granite is yielding clay compared with him,
A Jewish boy unto the Torah vowed."¹

1. *Hamathmid*, by H. N. Bialik, translated by Maurice Samuel.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PLAIN MAN

All who at any time were under the influence of the Hafetz Hayim were touched by the modesty and plainness of his personality. They tell innumerable anecdotes about his habitual meekness and simplicity.

Once he was riding on a swiftly speeding train, sitting back obscurely in his seat. Around him the travelers chatted, munched bits of food, or gazed indifferently at the passing landscape; but he sat quietly, his eyes closed, his lips moving. When he opened his eyes, they were pools of calm and peace, as if reflecting the light of faith which shone on his features. Soon another traveler, noting the old man immersed in his reflections, came to sit beside him.

"*Shalom Alechem, Reb Yid,*" he began in the quaint manner with which Jews have addressed their brethren since time immemorial. "Where do you come from?"

"*Alechem Shalom;* I come from the province of Wilna," the little man murmured.

"Yes, but what is the name of your town?"

"It is but an insignificant townlet near the city of Lida," came the answer.

"And what is the name of this townlet?" persisted the traveler.

"Radun."

"Oh, Radun, the home of the *zaddik* and *gaon*, the Hafetz Hayim!" The man looked pleased with himself, for now he was treading on familiar ground.

"You probably know the great man well, don't you?"

"Ah, yes, I know him, but neither as a *zaddik* nor a *gaon*, for he is a plain man." The little white head shook emphatically, as if to add strength to his point.

The traveler drew himself up in angry disdain. "I am surprised that a man like you, who looks religious and learned, should talk in such a manner about the jewel of our age. The entire world has acclaimed him as the greatest *zaddik* of our generation, yet you can dare talk in so insulting a fashion."

"Excuse me, my dear man, it is not an insult; it is the truth," he remonstrated softly.

The traveler's rage, mounting ever higher, now reached its boiling point and bubbled over into spluttering insults that showered on the elderly man; then the furious voyager marched off to his seat in the next wagon.

At the next station, a host of new passengers filled the wagon where the old gentleman had gathered himself once more into the fold of his meditations. "The Hafetz Hayim is here." The whisper buzzed quickly from ear to ear. Soon, from one end of the

train to the other, people flocked to pay their respects to the beloved rabbi; the disgruntled traveler too was swept along by the current. He became aware that the little old man, with his simple cloak and velvet hat, his quiet, gentle manner, was indeed the Hafetz Hayim. Shock gave way to sorrow and contrition, as he offered his apology and begged to be forgiven.

But the saint, remarkably calm in the whirlpool of praise seething around him, shrugged his shoulders. "Why must I forgive you? You did not insult me. And if you did, it was not your fault, for not having known me, you called me a *zaddik*."

Still another of these anecdotes is concerned with his first visit to Warsaw, to see the highly honored sage, Rabbi Naphtali Silberberg. On being asked his occupation, Reb Israel Meir introduced himself simply as an insignificant author, at which, without further inquiry, Rabbi Naphtali received him cordially. They conversed for a while, till the host asked to be excused so he might spare some time for his customary studies; but the stranger, seemingly heedless of this hint, continued talking. Another hour passed; and the host remarked that if he were to waste precious time on mere conversation, he would all too soon become an ignoramus. He insisted, therefore, that they turn to scholarly discourse. Thereupon the guest answered, "True, to learn is indeed a great virtue; yet to have conversed for more

than three hours and to have avoided frivolity and evil is equally praiseworthy."

This remark astounded Rabbi Naphtali. In a puzzled tone he asked, "You say you are an author. Of what book, pray?"

Quite simply, his guest answered, "*The Hafetz Hayim.*"

Enthusiasm lit up R. Naphtali's face as he exclaimed, "So you are the author of the *Hafetz Hayim*! I must apologize for the slight respect I have given so illustrious a visitor!" and he invited the modest man to be his guest. Thereafter, he took every opportunity to converse with the *Hafetz Hayim*, asserting with the conviction born of experience, "To converse with the *Hafetz Hayim* is in itself as meritorious as study of the Torah."

Again, we see the sage speaking to a certain *Reb Yoseph* of Slonim, who had just made out his last will and testament. Reading the papers through, the *Hafetz Hayim* frowned imperceptibly and said, "I am surprised at you, *Reb Yoseph*, for making such a blunder. Among your three sons and wife you have divided your forty thousand rubles equally, your poor relatives are amply taken care of from the proceeds of your belongings; while your large and excellent library you have bequeathed to the yeshivoh. Don't you realize, though, that you have neglected yourself? For what, my dear *Reb Yoseph*, have you left for yourself in the Hereafter?—simply the reward of these books given to the yeshivoh.

But are books all that they need? The students too often know what it is to be in want of food and clothing. Your sons, on the other hand, have bulging pocketbooks, but the pockets of their minds may yawn hungrily for books and learning. You should, therefore, have reversed your well-intentioned will, leaving some of the books to your sons and part of the money to the yeshivoh. Furthermore, Scripture says, 'From thine own flesh hide not thyself,'¹ which according to the Talmud refers to one's relatives. The nearest relative, of course, is yourself. You, who have worked for your possessions and are entitled to their enjoyment, should at least consider yourself a member of the family, to share equally with the rest."

Reb Yoseph nodded as the gentle sage continued. "Besides, you should remember the old saying, 'To give when you are young is gold; when you are old, is silver; when you are dead, but copper.' Your youth already has passed and can never more be recaptured; but at least, in the fullness of your years, you can get your full value in silver."

1. Isaiah LVIII, 7.

CHAPTER IX

RUSSIAN ESPIONAGE

In the Yeshivah of Radun life flowed on for a while, untroubled. Progress was being made, as scholars tasted ever deeper of the glorious heritage of learning that countless ages had bequeathed them; while the world outside seemed to delight in helping to support this endless scholarly feast. In 1902 a new building took the place of the synagogue which had formerly harbored the Yeshivah; while in 1912 a modern edifice, with all necessary accommodations, was put up. The Hafetz Hayim had procured for his students Rabbi Moses Landynski and Rabbi Naph-tali Trop, whose lectures were gems of clarity and acuity; as dean he appointed his son-in-law, Rabbi Hirsh Levinson, an outstanding scholar. The Hafetz Hayim guided his little craft down the stream of years, always solicitous of its welfare, always careful to avoid hostile currents, the dangers that lurk around every bend to catch the navigator unawares.

Out of the path of some dangers, though, he could not steer his precious cargo; and this venerable man was not destined to crown his remaining years with the restful sailing which he wished for himself and his Yeshivah. For Russia under the Czar held

out other offerings than the olive wreaths of peace and tranquillity to those who dwelt within her borders; and during the World War false accusations and unjust plots were the only gifts handed out to the Jews. The Russians, according to the eternal rule of human nature, sought scapegoats for their defeats. Inevitably, following the path of countless generations, they chose the Jew. The military clique, then in the saddle, galloped ruthlessly over honor and decency, to divert public attention from their own inefficiency. Jewish individuals as well as entire communities were suspected of being in contact with the enemy.¹ Rabbis and prominent leaders were taken into custody as hostages, either under actual suspicion, or to guarantee the loyalty of their co-religionists. A ban was put on the many sacred traditions of the Jews, which a half-crazed Russian public now alleged were instruments of espionage. Driven by propaganda made keener by despair, they shaped the heretofore obvious patterns of Jewish ritual into a great Jewish plot. In the traditional

1. The author recalls an incident related to him by the late Rabbi Judah Leib Gordon, Chief Rabbi of Lomza (Polish city near the German frontier). In his efforts to intercede in behalf of his townspeople who were exposed to excesses by the soldiers, Rabbi Gordon appeared at the military headquarters, and approached the commanding general, with one hand in his pocket. The general became enraged and accused the old rabbi of concealing a weapon for the purpose of assassination. He immediately ordered his *aide-de-camp* to search the patriarch. Great was the general's dismay when from the pocket was uncovered a letter signed by Czar Nicholas himself, commending and thanking Rabbi Gordon for his patriotic services to his country. The embarrassed general was then compelled to apologize and express his compliments to the rabbi.

erub wire,² instigated solely to keep the Sabbath law, they saw a scheme for communication with the foe; in the trumpeting of the *shofar* on *Rosh Hashbanah*, that token of faith in blessings to come, they imagined a signal to the Germans; in every move, every murmur from the long suffering Jew, they saw an attempt to undermine their war machine. So they played their grotesque game, contrary to all the rules of honesty, while the innocent Jew, suffering doubly, was forced both to pay admission at the gate, as it were, in the form of war taxes and restrictions, and then to be blamed for defeats on the field as the game progressed.

This wave of animosity, sweeping over all Russia, sprinkled its bloody drops on the Yeshivah at Radun. Here, in the summer of 1914, among the three hundred and fifty students, there were three boys from Memel, Germany, cut off from homes and families. According to the war decrees, the subjects of hostile countries who reported themselves to Russian authorities were to be interned in a concentration camp somewhere near the barren icebox

2. *Erub Chatseroth* (lit. "combination of the houses in a court"). According to the traditional law we must not carry anything on the Sabbath from a private place into the street. The former is defined as belonging to one person or family (*reshuth bayachid*), and separated from the public (*reshuth harabim*) by a fence. The Jewish inhabitants of a court or town closed on all sides combined to form one family and thus turn the *reshuth harabim* into *reshuth bayachid*. The symbol of such a combination consists of some food kept in a room to which all have access. An opening left in a fence or wall around a *reshuth bayachid* must at least have some token of closure—a wire drawn through the open space from one part of the fence to the other. This symbol is called *erub*.

that was Siberia. These young scholars, however, reluctant to interrupt their study and fearful of stagnating and freezing in bleak isolation, decided to stay in Radun, there to drink further from the fountains of Talmudic lore. Radun had been a center of pilgrimage for Jews from all over the world. Some flocked to the Hafetz Hayim Yeshivah to acquire instruction and knowledge under his guidance, some to find spiritual strength and comfort, others to receive his saintly prayers and blessings, and many came for all three. But whatever may have attracted students to this happy hunting ground of wisdom, little attention was focused on the multitude of strangers who came and went.

In the spring of 1915, a strange young man came to Radun. Giving his occupation as a leather merchant or tanner from Meretz, a nearby town, he made the acquaintance of several students, especially of Ephraim Leibowitz, one of the boys from Memel. He listened sympathetically to the German boy's complaints of homelessness and solitude; and even promised to provide him with financial help. One afternoon he walked with a group of students, including Ephraim, out into the country. The dirt road meandered comfortably through the village to a sloping hill outside. Here the boys whistled through the grass as they lay on their backs, interspersing their serious thoughts with frivolous conversation. When they sat up, the tanner slipped a folded sheet of paper into Ephraim's pocket. Finally, warned by the lengthening shadows,

they rose to go and came once more to the town.

That evening, when the usual veil of quiet had folded over Radun, a squad of special detectives and gendarmes from Wilna surrounded the home where the unsuspecting Ephraim slept. At their head marched the tanner, who had promised they would catch a dangerous spy. The paper slipped into Ephraim's pocket contained a sketch of the plans of the fortresses at Kovno. The guards seized the boy, searched him roughly, and triumphantly drew from his pocket the tell-tale paper.

Ephraim stood very pale and shocked. His words of protest seemed to mock him in their futility. Iron shackles on his ankles were the only answer to his pleas. His host too, a white-bearded man who had already seen seventy summers, was carried off as an accomplice. But the tanner desired still more to prove his capability as a detective; he ordered the gendarmes to raid the house of the Hafetz Hayim. At that, however, even the local police balked. There could be no doubt of the integrity and loyalty of this venerable sage.

With unspeakable grief the Hafetz Hayim heard of the calamity that had befallen his pupil. But the affair was not ended with the arrest of Ephraim; the Yeshivah as well as its leader were thereafter under constant surveillance of the police. Even the visits of his wife to the Carlsbad baths during the summers of 1913 and 1914 were construed as attempts to carry on activities with the Germans, according to rumors

circulated among the ignorant peasants in the vicinity. Midnight raids on the Yeshivah became frequent occurrences. The Hafetz Hayim himself became cautious in all his movements so there might be no ground for misunderstanding; and he begged his followers to visit him only within certain limited hours.

He betook himself to Wilna to seek the release of Ephraim and of the boy's host, Reb Leib Matles. He succeeded only in removing suspicion from Reb Leib. With the confusion in the Russian ranks caused by the rapidly advancing German army, further attempts seemed futile. The Germans even now were thundering at the gates of Wilna. There could be no thought for one German boy unjustly accused, when the very name of Germany to those people spelled death and destruction. In the haste that springs from fear, the retreating Russians transferred their prisoners and moved their records into a far off corner of Russia.

Though the Hafetz Hayim disliked the Russians for their inhuman tactics, he despised the Germans even more. For with his keen perception, he saw more danger in the anti-Semitism of Germany, superficially concealed beneath the cloak of culture, than in the open hooliganism of the Russians. He chose, therefore, aged and weary though he was, to wander with the retreating Russians rather than to remain under German occupation. For more than a year, while sojourning in a Russia that was too busy with its vast internal disorders to pay attention to so in-

significant a symptom of rottenness as the case of Ephraim Leibowitz, the Hafetz Hayim vainly sought to find the boy. It was not till the summer of 1916 that he received a telegram saying that Ephraim was imprisoned in the city of Penza, and would soon be tried by court martial. In his desire to see justice meted out, at last, the Hafetz Hayim decided to ask Oscar Grusenberg to be the boy's counsel. This great lawyer had already achieved a world-wide reputation through his successful defense of Mendel Beilis in the infamous blood accusation trial. The Hafetz Hayim sent two of his leading disciples to St. Petersburg to see him. At a time, however, when chaos ruled, when Czardom was making one last attempt to keep its hold on a downtrodden people, when the already turbulent air was charged with hatred and suspicion against the Jew, Grusenberg refused to undertake the defense.

When the Hafetz Hayim learned of Grusenberg's decision, he decided to go to St. Petersburg himself. The advocate was astonished on seeing this feeble, eighty-year-old sage pleading so passionately for a young boy. The Hafetz Hayim emphasized the double merit involved in such a deed; for, the prisoner being a stranger in Russia, it was a special duty to display double love to him, as becomes a brother and a sojourner.

"And are you sure," asked Grusenberg, peering keenly at the old man, "that the boy is innocent?"

A smile lit up the hoary face, like a splash of

sunshine falling on an ancient tree. "Ah, but you certainly have ample proof of that. Would I, a feeble old man, have risked my life by undertaking such a journey at this time of year, were I not thoroughly convinced that this young life I am trying to save is guiltless?"

The distinguished jurist was touched. "You, my dear rabbi, are not an old man; in you, on the contrary, is the true spirit of youth. You who so readily would make such a sacrifice in order to save a simple life are not old; it is we, lacking such courage, who are the ancients."

To his wife, who till now had remained in the background, Grusenberg turned with a shining face. "Behold, at this time when human life has no more value than that of a beast, when the human conscience has become petrified and its sap of humanity runs dry, can any other people boast of such a saint, who would endanger his own life so that some insignificant boy may live?"

"Ah," remonstrated the Hafetz Hayim, "life is a God-given gift, and its significance is not always commensurate with age; nor should its importance be valued according to the number of people involved. The life of any human being is precious. 'He who saves a single human life is as though he sustained the whole world,' says the Talmud. How much more so, then, the life of a brilliant lad, who chose to offer up the innocence and fervor of his youth on the altar of the Torah?"

Grusenberg, nevertheless, was persistent in his refusal to take over the defense. He pointed out, with the well-balanced sanity that years of courtroom work had cultivated, that for him to appear in the capacity of a lawyer in such a case would be a risk not only to himself, but even more so to the defendant, who was portrayed by the prosecution as that most heinous of double-headed monsters—a Jew and a German in one. So while promising his co-operation in any other way, he suggested as attorney a Christian of military rank—a Captain Zwiozick.

The trial was scheduled for the month of December, in the city of Witebsk, before the customary military court of three army generals. The Hafetz Hayim, his son-in-law Rabbi Hirsh Levinson, and Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman were called as witnesses by the defense. When the Hafetz Hayim was called upon to testify, the presiding judge, cool and impeccably correct, asked him to swear that the defendant was not a German spy. Backed by the tradition of ages, the witness declared that all his life he had never uttered a lie; and nothing could make him change this habit. However, since a faithful Jew will not swear, he could not swear even concerning a truth. There was something in the noble austerity of his bearing, the combination at once of courage and simplicity, that defied the pressure a cruder order might bring to bear; his testimony was given without oath.

After the cross-examination, counsel for the defendant, seeking to strengthen the chain of his case

by emphasizing the merit of its chief link, described the personality of this witness.

Once, he told them, as the rabbi was walking along a Warsaw street, he was stopped by a stranger who asked him to change a five ruble note. The rabbi took out his pocketbook to comply with the request. The stranger, however, grabbed the purse full of money and ran off. The rabbi's companion, enraged, shouted to passers-by to catch the thief; but the gentle saint stopped him and hurried after the thief himself with the exclamation, "I forgive you, I forgive you! It is yours!"

His companion was amazed. But the rabbi explained that if the stranger were not in dire straits he would not have committed the theft. Since he might need the money to save his family from starvation, he should bear no extra burdens when his conscience would awake and desire repentance.³

The presiding judge listened with a scorn unmitigated even by the slightest approval. "Do you believe this yourself, sir?"

"No, your honor," answered the lawyer, "I consider it but a legend."

"If so, what evidence do you bring to illustrate the character of the witness?"

The lawyer drew a deep breath, as a player about to pull his last trump card, on which depends the

3. In his act the Hafetz Hayim was probably also prompted by an ancient dictum of our sages: "He who causes others to be punished, though it may be entirely the fault of the latter, will not be permitted in the world to come to enter the divine presence of the *Shechina*" (Sabbath 149a).

success of the game. "Ah, but do people tell such legends about you too, your honor, or about any of your honored colleagues? The very fact that people relate such legends about one proves the greatness of the person!"

But the judge came back with a card even higher. "Yes, I'll admit that this rabbi meant to tell the truth; but those Germans are so cunning that they could mislead even a saint, and all the rabbis who are present as witnesses."

Then the prosecutor, rubbing his thick hands together, like a butcher in anticipation of the slaughter, reviewed the disaster of the Russian army at Kovno, the blood of the Russians spilled there, the shame that the defeat had caused to Russia and the Czar. For all this—and in fact, for the entire war and all the trouble at home, his tone seemed to imply—he blamed the defendant's alleged spying activities. In no uncertain terms, he demanded the sentence of death.

Ephraim was adjudged guilty. Considering his age, however, the death sentence was changed to imprisonment for twelve years; and out of the munificent goodness of their hearts—if hearts really beat beneath the guilt of their military uniforms—they deducted the period he had already spent in the dungeon. Ephraim stood still for a moment as the voice of the judge tolled out his sentence; then he fell senseless to the ground. Imprisonment for almost two years had imbued him with no power to look forward to more.

At the Yeshivah, as the mournful news spread, hopeful faces gave way to tears, while most of all, they worried as to the effect it would have on their master. Yet calm and serene did the aged rabbi remain—a strong oak among reeds. While his pupils gazed in wonder and adoration his only comment was: "Fools, they sentenced him to imprisonment for ten years; and it never occurred to them that their corrupt system may not last even ten months and perhaps not even ten weeks."

This declaration proved prophetic indeed. For before the expiration of ten weeks, in March, 1917, came the first of those revolutions which ultimately threw off the rotten cloak of Czardom and left Russia standing, at last, in the dress of equal opportunity. In this confused period that marked the twilight of corrupt aristocracy, Grusenberg brought the case to the attention of the authorities and Ephraim was freed.

CHAPTER X

GLOOM OF EXILE

The elements of sweetness and light were sadly lacking from the concoction which made up Russia from 1915 to 1921, and for the Hafetz Hayim there were innumerable trials and difficulties in the portion that was his. As a refugee he wandered from Smilovitz to Semyatch and finally to Snovsk. Always, during the gloom that pervaded these years, the ideal of sustaining his Yeshivah was the beacon which lit his way in a befogged sky. Like a father devoted to his children, his every thought was to protect his students—no easy task in this Russia, which lay bleeding from her wounds and crying out from the disorders which had ravaged her from within and without. But during the first five years of his *galuth*, the indefatigable spirit and energy of the Hafetz Hayim buoyed him up above the waters of hardship and despair which might have overcome one less courageous.

He concerned himself, moreover, not only with his own following, but sought as well to obtain food for the poor in the communities where he sojourned. Thus, while at Smilovitz, the late Rabbi Bezalel Zeitzik asked the aged leader to help him plead for Passover funds (*maoth hittim*) for the poor, contribu-

tions for whom had come forth in scanty measure. The Hafetz Hayim, in the kindly tones still remarkably clear and distinct, addressed the people in their synagogue:

"Brethren, I want your advice. I am already growing old, as you see, and expect before long to be summoned before the Heavenly Tribunal of Justice. Suppose I shall be asked, 'Israel Meir, you were in Smilovitz? Tell us something about the generosity of your brethren there.' What shall I reply? To say that you are charitable will not be the truth, and all my life I have never lied. To tell the truth, on the other hand, would imply an evil tongue, against which as you know I have also cautiously guarded myself. What shall I do?"

He no sooner had stepped down from the pulpit than the assembly hurried forward with lavish contributions, as if impelled by the sheer force of his magnetism. For many years the poor of Smilovitz, recalling with tender memories that plentiful Passover, uttered a blessing when they heard the name of the Hafetz Hayim.

Again, at Semyatch, where he had spent several years, as the White Russians approached on their customary path of devastation, the Hafetz Hayim decided to depart. But with solicitude for the unfortunate, he delivered a farewell sermon to the community, begging them to care for the poor and needy in their midst. And as Moses could smite a rock and miraculously cause water to gush forth, so the Hafetz

Hayim could touch the hardest hearts and bring from them charity and kindness. But in his usual manner, at the close of his sermon, not satisfied to simply help the poor, he uttered a plea for forgiveness lest he had insulted any of the townspeople.

As he departed from the synagogue in simple dignity, he met the district commissar, comrade Artchik, and invited him to break bread with him at the third Sabbath meal. Artchik, astounded, said that for him to partake of a ritual meal with a rabbi might be construed as treason to his party. "Where do I come to eat with you—I, a *goy*, a Sabbath violator?"

The rabbi insisted that at least he listen to a short discourse on a biblical passage; but even this frightened Artchik, and he replied, "Rabbi, how would I grasp your thought, when I am ignorant as far as your books are concerned?"

Waving these arguments aside in good-natured fashion, the Hafetz Hayim persuaded him to listen. "I shall try to explain to you, Commissar, a passage which undoubtedly you learned as a little boy in *heder*. It is written in Genesis that God planted the tree of life in the midst of the garden of Eden. According to *Onkelos* it was exactly in the center. But why, you may ask, just in the center? Simply because the tree of life is the symbol of the eternal life to which we all aspire. It was thus equally accessible from all sides. That is, some may reach eternal bliss by virtue of studying the Torah, others by charitable deeds. Thus, even you have an opportunity to achieve

everlasting felicity. Until now I have taken care of the poor of this town. But as I am about to leave, my heart pains me to think of their unfortunate lot. You confiscated the possessions of the rich. Had you asked me, I would have advised you to return them to whom they rightfully belong, but since you will not return their wealth, I urge you to give at least part of it to the needy of this community. This is your opportunity."

Artchik was so touched by the simple and heartfelt plea of the Hafetz Hayim that he exclaimed enthusiastically:

"Rabbi, you are the truest communist of us all. We only know how to take away from the rich, but forget to provide for the poor. While you, my dear rabbi, always feel their plight and have their interest at heart!"

On one occasion, while sojourning in Snovsk, the Bolsheviki learned that the aged Hafetz Hayim was sipping his tea without sugar, which was then a very scarce and therefore most expensive article. They sent him, as a token of their esteem, ten pounds of sugar. "But you must have taken it away from somebody," the Hafetz Hayim said, and thereupon refused to accept it.

In a letter addressed to the Central Committee of New York at the end of the summer of 1921, the Hafetz Hayim wrote: "I too have endured the lot of the wanderer in Russia. During the six years of my sojourn there together with the Yeshivah, I lived

in three different places, Smilovitz, Semyatch, and Snovsk. Thank God, I succeeded in maintaining the Yeshivah quite well under the circumstances. Indirectly, its support was facilitated by the Bolshevik authorities. But at the end there came a change for the worse. The Bolsheviks drafted people for public work and forced them to labor on the Sabbath. They even drafted the students of the Yeshivah. I tried to interfere, but all my efforts proved in vain. I, therefore, decided to leave the place where His Name, blessed be He, was being publicly profaned. I have returned home with the Yeshivah. . . .”

The Hafetz Hayim, heartbroken at these attacks made on the citadel of his faith, tried to intercede on behalf of those compelled to work on the Sabbath. Early one Sabbath morning he appeared before the commissar, who was astounded at seeing the octogenarian sage before him.

“What’s on your mind, rabbi?” he asked.

“Before stating my petition,” his visitor replied gently, “I wish to relate an incident. Near Smilovitz a man, arrested for evading the excise tax on liquor, was sentenced to be banished to Siberia. As he was dragged along in shackles through the city, he begged to see the rabbi. When the latter appeared, the wretched prisoner burst into tears, blaming the rabbi for his plight. ‘You, rabbi, must have heard that I was engaged in illegal liquor sales. It was, therefore, your duty to warn me against such violations. Had

you done your duty I would not have come to this misfortune!"

"Likewise," the Hafetz Hayim continued in solemn exhortation, "you, as a Jew, will have to give account in the Hereafter for the viciousness you have displayed as a public official, forcing the faithful to violate their most sacred day. You may blame it then on me, saying, 'There was an old rabbi in the city who knew my evil acts and did not warn me, so he ought to be blamed for them, not I.' I, therefore, come to you to protest against your wickedness. Remember that you will have to pay the penalty for all that. Repent, I say to you; forsake your evil ways, and you'll be forgiven." The Hafetz Hayim left the commissar dumbfounded.

Notwithstanding all this, the official hesitated to yield to the rabbi's plea, lest he thereby endanger the Revolution . . .

The Hafetz Hayim hastened his departure from Russia also because of the loss sustained by the death of his most devoted son-in-law, Rabbi Hirsh Levinson, who had been dean of the Yeshivah.

"I have lost my right hand," the Hafetz Hayim grieved. "The ship has lost its captain in the midst of a stormy sea. I must therefore hasten to bring her back to harbor and to safety." He returned to Radun to rehabilitate his Yeshivah, like an architect who adds the necessary beams, so his house will not fall apart.

The Hafetz Hayim grew much perturbed over

the plight of his brethren in Soviet Russia, over the persecution launched by the Bolsheviki against the faithful. In his daily prayers he used to weep bitterly over their lot, repeatedly asking Jewish communities the world over to recite special prayers of intercession in the synagogues on behalf of the Russian Jew; and for such occasions he composed a special prayer:

May it be Thy will, O Eternal, our God and the God of our Fathers, the Strength of Jacob and the Holy One of Israel, that the merit of reciting the Psalms arouse Thy abundant mercy for Thy people Israel, particularly for our oppressed and tortured brethren in Russia. Mayest Thou shield them from their enemies, who rise up against them to make them transgress their religion. Deliver them from distress, hunger, captivity, and from all shame and sorrow. Subdue the defamers of Thy Law and humble the arrogant, who practice persecution against the faithful. O, gracious and compassionate King! We beseech Thee to redeem the children of Jacob, and to destroy and frustrate the counsel of all those who devise evil against us.

O, look upon our plight, and behold our affliction; defend our cause and let all know that Thou art the Holy One of Israel and their Redeemer. Remember, O Lord, Thy poor and needy children who trust in Thee and hope for Thy help all their days.

O, Father, our King, we pray Thee to suffer

Thy tender mercy to suppress Thy wrath and in Thy great goodness turn away Thine anger from Thy people. Thou who livest eternally, may it be Thy will for the merit of Thy Torah to perform miracles and wonders for the protection of Israel, particularly for those dwelling in Russia. Save them, All-Merciful, because of Thy Holy Name. May our ever defending angels present our prayers to Thee.

By virtue of Thy infinite compassion, as it is said: "For a Lord of Mercy is the Eternal, thy God. He shall not forsake thee nor destroy thee, nor shall He forget the covenant with thy fathers to whom he swore," we pray thee, hasten our salvation! Amen.

He frequently called upon his co-religionists throughout the diaspora to contribute funds for their needy and suffering brethren in chaotic Russia.

CHAPTER XI
THE GREAT ASSEMBLY
(Kenessiah Hagedolah)

Among the hundreds of delegates and thousands of guests from all over the world, among the prominent rabbis, saints, and scholars, Hassidic dignitaries, and leaders, who made a splendid appearance at the great congress of Jewish orthodoxy in Vienna in August 1923, no one attracted so much attention and aroused so much admiration as did the plainly-clothed and retiring person of the Hafetz Hayim. He was, indeed, the cynosure of the entire convention from its inception to its end. In his address opening the assembly, he manifested his astonishment at having been given the honor of making the initial address.

"Since there are so many really great scholars, outstanding saints and rabbis to be accorded this special honor, why pick a plain, simple Jew from a small town like myself? I am neither rabbi nor saint, and quite far from a great scholar. It is written, 'Neither shalt thou go up steps upon my altar, that thine nakedness be not laid open thereon.'¹ This, I think, is a warning that one should avoid ascending

1. Exodus XX. 26.

too high, lest one's faults be revealed to all. Most likely I was chosen because I am a *cohen* (priest), of whom the Torah commands that he be given first honors, and also by virtue of my age—I am perhaps the oldest here. Because this, however, has nothing to do with personal achievements, but primarily with birth, I shall confine myself to bestowing upon you the priestly blessing, which I as a *cohen* am enjoined to exercise.”

He then blessed the assembly with the blessing of the *cobanim* while the eyes of those present filled with tears; and continued.

“To begin with, the Agudath Israel aims above all to restore the prestige of the Torah as a factor in every endeavor of life. It particularly emphasizes that the Torah is not a mere private matter for the individual but a national treasure to be cherished by all. Its contention is that Judaism is not some changing social or political dream, but a clearly defined religious ideal, everlasting in its applicability and inexhaustible in its spiritual resources.”

In another address delivered before the leading representatives of that assembly, the Hafetz Hayim said:

“When a king visits a province of his dominion, the governor and his retinue come out to pay their tribute, to glorify, guard, and honor their master. As the king enters a city the mayor and his staff are charged with these duties. As the king proceeds, the head of each county and district, however low his

rank, is entrusted with the guardianship of the king's glory. Likewise, throughout the ages, the Almighty in his grandeur made His appearance before the patriarchs and they magnified Him in their generations. He then revealed Himself in His utmost splendor at Sinai; and Moses, Aaron, and the elders proclaimed His glory and omnipotence. In the succeeding generations the prophets, the Men of the Great Assembly, the *tannaim*, *amoraim*, *geonim*, and rabbis respectively, discharged their full responsibility. They were aware that although they stood on a lower spiritual pedestal than those preceding them, in their age they owed just as much allegiance to the Eternal and were responsible for the maintenance of His glory.

"We in our time, compared with the past, are but like ordinary policemen compared with the governor, or commissioner. Yet every one is not less bound to concentrate his utmost in discharging his duties in guarding and preserving the glory of Heaven on earth!"

Gedaliah Bublick, then editor of the *Yiddish Tageblatt*, an eye-witness, described his impression of the Hafetz Hayim at that assembly.

"In this age no other person is hallowed so much, or is equal in saintliness to the Hafetz Hayim. He is acclaimed by his co-religionists as the greatest *zaddik* of his generation.

"The appearance of the Hafetz Hayim in the assembly hall electrifies the crowd and arouses an unequaled expression of enthusiasm. The eyes of all

people are directed toward one—the Hafetz Hayim.

“Himself of small stature, old and feeble, his voice low and soft, vibrating with a youthful freshness, his angelic face adorned constantly with a peaceful and kindly expression, his eyes smiling good-naturedly—it seems that this saintly sage was never angry. His every utterance, his every gesture breathes with boundless goodness and modesty. He appears immune to the least trace of jealousy. He is the embodiment of peace.

“The Hafetz Hayim never desired leadership and even now he would not. All his life he has asked his co-religionists to be good, honest, religious, and upright Jews. He is far from the politics of the various parties, yet when he was told that his presence would help strengthen Judaism, he came.

“He speaks in a low tone. Only those very near him can hear. However, no one in the whole crowd moves. They are overwhelmed with a profound emotion, even those in the far corners of the large hall. The people who cannot hear his words swallow his gestures. They need not listen to his utterances. They feel them deep in their souls. All their thoughts and sentiments run in one direction. They are enthused and thrilled in his presence; and he continues his talk:

““You must never despair, never lose hope or feel discouraged. If one of your children has gone astray, see that the rest of them remain loyal to their faith. Should even all of them forsake the right path,

and it be impossible to save even one, then help others to be good Jews. The main thing is not to lose courage. We Jews should never abandon hope even if whole communities should desert the Jewish ranks. Our history demonstrates that when the Jews of some particular country betrayed their brethren Judaism sprouted afresh in another.

“Remember, when the Messiah makes his appearance and the elderly Jews go out to meet him, the first question he will ask is, ‘Where is your youth?’ But as the first redeemer, Moses, declared, ‘With our youth and with our elders we shall go to celebrate the feast of God.’”

CHAPTER XII

A WARNING TO THE POLES

The Jews have lived in Poland for the last 800 years. Persecuted by the crusaders in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the weary Jews were glad to find in Poland a haven of refuge. The Polish Jew has since become attached to this country. With the sweat of his brow he helped to cultivate its land, develop its industries, and stimulate its commerce. In every manner possible he has proved worthy of its trust.

But the children of the once hospitable ancestors have failed to live up to the elementary principles of humanity. The Jew bled for Poland's freedom and independence. His sons helped to defend her frontiers and his money he gave freely to finance the rebellions against her usurpers and partitioners. Now that Poland is a free and independent republic, the Poles use all their cunning and viciousness to oppress the Jew and deprive him of his subsistence.

The ruthless effort of Poland's super-patriots to undermine the existence of their Jews gave a great deal of anxiety and pain to the Hafetz Hayim. His pure heart and angelic integrity were shocked at the

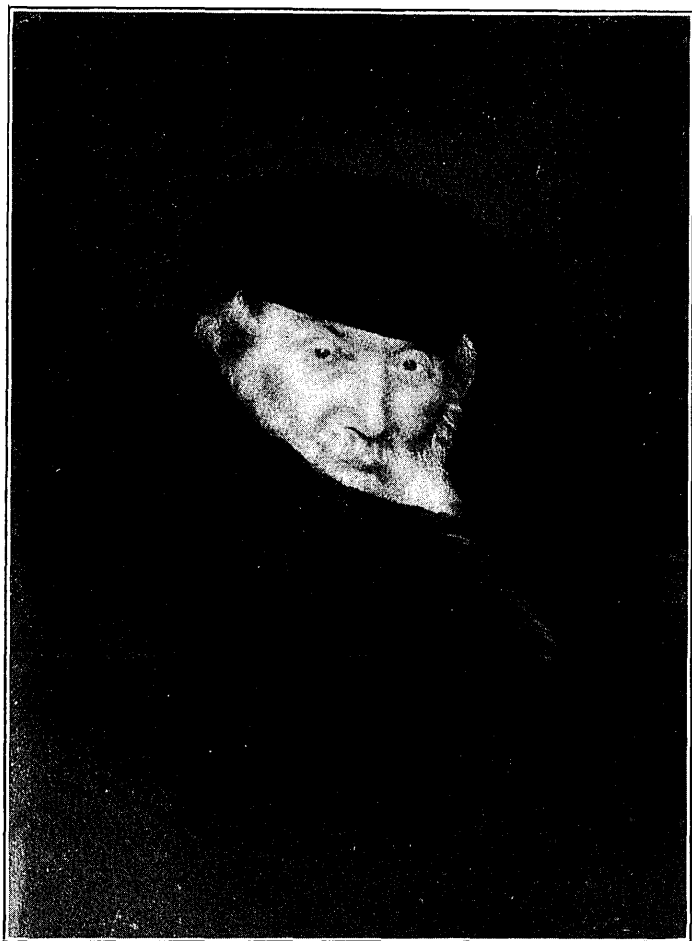
thought that human beings are capable of degrading themselves into such a state of beastliness.

He personally petitioned Poland's president, Moscicki, during the latter's visit at Radun on his tour through the country. On various other occasions he defended the Jewish cause before a number of other high state officials.

In the winter of 1930 he learned that the government had conspired to force its will upon the religious life of the Jew. Such an attempt the Hafetz Hayim deemed a violent attack upon the very fundamentals of Judaism. He therefore resolved to resist with all his strength the materialization of this plot.

Though bent by age and weakness, the Hafetz Hayim led a delegation of three famous rabbis and two laymen to the Polish Prime Minister Bartel. As spokesman, he insisted that the government keep its hands off all religious matters, demanded the right for the Jews to arrange their religious life according to the dictates of their conscience, and protested against economic restrictions and social discrimination imposed upon his co-religionists. He said in part:

"Our sages declare that Cyrus (of Persia) deserved to be instrumental in the rebuilding of the Temple, because he shed tears upon hearing of the destruction of the First Temple. I recall the horrors of almost seventy years ago, when the Russian Cossacks dragged in shackles the Polish patriots who rebelled against the Czarist yoke. They were banished to Siberia and to some other isolated sections in far



THE HAFETZ HAYIM IN MARCH, 1930,
BEFORE THE HEADS OF THE POLISH GOVERNMENT

off Russia. I remember how heartbroken I then felt. Retiring to my room in tears, I prayed to the Almighty, saying: 'O Thou Whose justice and mercy are infinite, do not these Poles have a right to live their own life as freely and independently as their oppressors . . . ?' So God granted me the privilege of seeing a resurrected and independent Poland. Do you wish to cause me tears again? Remember," he continued, "that God always interferes in favor of the oppressed! Then why be oppressors?"

So sincere and prophetic a warning from a zealous lover of mankind could not fail to leave an impression upon the dignitaries of the Polish state. The speaker was promised favorable consideration of his petition.



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CHAPTER XIII

A DREAM UNANSWERED

"Beautiful height! O joy! the whole world's gladness.
O great king's city, mountain blest;
My soul is yearning unto thee—is yearning
From limits of the West." ¹

From time immemorial, the Jew upon entering Jerusalem has lifted his traditional veil of sorrow and assumed the radiant garb of gladness. Outside of her walls, say the sages, there was a *kippah shel heshbonoth*, a special place where the pilgrims might settle all financial difficulties, and leave their worries.² For Zion to the Jew has been the centripetal force of his dream, the hub of all his aspirations and desires. In moments of misery and persecution thoughts of Zion have helped save the people from annihilation at the hands of countless oppressors. It was at these times, with hearts overburdened with misery, that they hoped for the coming of the Messiah, who would miraculously lighten the load and return them to the land of their fathers. But even in eras of peace, when a tranquil sun shone undisturbed by the thunder and storms of oppression, the Jew cherished dearly and de-

1. Judah HaLevi.

2. Ex. R. 52.

voutly the remembrance of Zion. "By the waters of Babylon, there we sat and wept when we remembered Zion." For even in Babylon, where they were enjoying security, freedom, and comfort, the thought of their homeland pulled like a vibrant bow across the strings of their hearts.

With such a heritage behind him, it was only natural that the Hafetz Hayim should long some day to settle in the Holy Land. In 1880 Rabbi Judah had left his post in Radun to live in Palestine; and thence he wrote to the Hafetz Hayim that during all his life in *galuth* he had never really experienced the true holiness of the Sabbath. "The true Sabbath I began to feel only within the atmosphere of the Holy Land." His message served to arouse to even higher pitch the fervor of the Hafetz Hayim. When he gave his oldest daughter Gitel in betrothal to Rabbi Aaron Kagan in September, 1882, he demanded a stipulation from his son-in-law that if he should in the meantime move to Palestine they too go along with him. The same provision he wrote into the engagement contract of his second son-in-law, Rabbi Hirsh Levinson, and his daughter Sarah, in October, 1886; and also that of his third son-in-law, Rabbi Mendel Zack, and Feiga, in October, 1922. This provision applied to his wife as well.

But though he was ever ready to leave his material anxieties behind and flee to Palestine, his continuous activities for his people in exile caused him to delay ever longer the realization of his dream. His

spirit soared to Zion; but the fetters that detained his body were the troubles of his brethren throughout the diaspora, their need for spiritual guidance. "The study of the Torah is more essential than *Eretz Yisrael*—nay, even more than the building of the Temple," he would say, illustrating his statement from the records of the Talmud. And from the glorious examples of the past, he would point to Ezra the Scribe, disciple of the sage Baruch ben Neriah, who because of his studies with his old master, too feeble to be moved, did not join the first party returning from Babylon to Jerusalem during the reign of Cyrus.

During the long years of wandering in Russia, he had planned to go directly through Odessa to Palestine. The unexpected death of his son-in-law, Rabbi Hirsh Levinson, however, compelled him to return to Radun instead. Fate had set her first obstacle in the path of his dream.

The Hafetz Hayim, cherishing the fond hope that his presence might not always be essential to the upkeep of the Yeshivah, was instrumental in organizing, in 1924, the already mentioned *Vaad Hayeshivoth*, which levied a tax of eighteen zlotas a year upon every faithful Jew for the upkeep of the Torah. Thus, his beloved yeshivoth having been made temporarily secure, and his age having crept on with ruthless, cruel rapidity, the Hafetz Hayim deemed his presence in Poland unimportant. In 1926 he prepared with a joyous heart to make the journey. His many admirers in Palestine had made all arrange-

ments to welcome this light of Israel into the land of Israel. They had built him a house in the colony *Petach Tikvah*, while the Hafetz Hayim had already issued a farewell message to his brethren in *galuth*, urging them to remain steadfast in their faith and ardent supporters of the Torah.

But fate once more set impediments along the road. The leading rabbis held different opinions from the Hafetz Hayim about his presence being no longer needed. When they heard that the prop on which they had leaned these many years was to be carried away, they summoned a conference and asked the Hafetz Hayim to postpone his journey, fearing that in his absence the new *Vaad Hayeshivoth* might wither and fade away. Even Rabbi Grodzensky, foremost sage of Israel, added his pleas, saying that as long as a father dwells among his children, though he may be weak and feeble, their conduct is somehow affected. The way to Palestine shone alluringly; yet the Hafetz Hayim resolutely turned his eyes and yielded to the pleas of those who needed him.

He determined, however, to leave three months later, whereupon one accident occurred after the other. First his wife took ill, then his daughter, and finally himself. Due to his frailty he was forced to renounce forever the desire he had so long cherished.

He who had comforted his people sought in vain to comfort himself in the bosom of Zion. His was a lot not unique. Moses too had traveled the weary road of his duties, but had never passed the threshold

of the glorious home to which at last he had come. So the Hafetz Hayim paused longingly at the doorway. Inside was the beauty, the glory, the fulfillment of all his dreams. But outside there were the troubles, the needs that tugged inexorably at his being. For him there was no entrance into the haven of his people.

CHAPTER XIV

THE END OF HARVEST

Throughout his illustrious life, the Hafetz Hayim, in the tradition of orthodox Jews, had made it a rule not to celebrate his birthdays. Taking as his premise the age-old adage, "Not of thy will wast thou born," he argued, with the humble modesty so typical of him, that on birthdays he had nothing to celebrate, for birth in itself carries with it no great accomplishment. Yet others rejoiced, not only on the day which had given him birth, but on every day in which he lived. For with his every breath there sprang a seed of kindness and goodness, to be sown in the plentiful fields of men's woes, and to be reaped in the harvest of learning and blessing that resulted from his acts. But this merciful harvesting could not go on forever. He who had sown was growing weary, and the sun at last was setting on the long day which had seen his toil. His had been an arduous, often thankless task; the ground, overgrown with hostility, with ignorance, had not been easy to furrow; the atmosphere had oft played havoc with his plans; the tools he had used were acquired by labor no less hard because it sprang from love. Yet, before he slowly turned to seek the

rest he so well deserved, he looked out over the fields where he had toiled, and saw the crop he had planted and fed and cared for with such ardor. As the shadows lengthened around him, as the sun sank ever lower, as he stood on the last lap of the journey to his final home, he thought of the many who had learned and studied under his guidance; he thought of the poor who had been fed through his efforts; he thought of the weary whose burden had been lightened, of the unhappy who had rediscovered gladness, and of the wicked who had repented of their ways. A fruitful crop indeed; and others would have rejoiced at this plentiful flowering. Yet to the Hafetz Hayim it seemed but scant and meagre compared with the manifold results for which he had wished. He had set his goal high above the reach of mortal man. It was inevitable in his humility that he should deem his produce too small.

For the greater part of two years the Hafetz Hayim lay in bed, resting from his labors, waiting for the long night which was soon to give him the only real rest of all. His heart beat weakly, as if the pipes which carried the blood had grown rusty and weak in their long service. His hearing was diminished, and his body grew light and feeble. But as his physical faculties became faint, as the heart beat ever more softly, still the spirit, the noble guest which for many years had dwelt within him, remained strong.

His students, anxious for the joy of watching by

their teacher, took turns day and night beside the bed. Very feeble, very white, tended by gentle loving hands, surrounded by these young scholars, he looked like an ancient, lovely parchment, left by some queer chance among the array of new and shiny books. Guests came from all over the world, to pay their last visit to the sage. In small groups they filtered into the sick room, hushed and full of awe. And with his keen mind, which functioned miraculously in his aged body, the Hafetz Hayim received these visitors, inquired with utmost anxiety concerning the lot of his brethren in other lands, and gave them his blessing.

It seemed almost as though he could never depart from this world, which had proved so rich a planting ground for his goodness. Daily his students, clustering around his bedside, marveled at the manner in which he clung to life. But the thread by which he held was growing feeble; it had long since spun out, and very soon would have to break. He caught a slight cold; but the frame of his body was so weak that the softest wind could knock it down. Quickly the cold developed into pneumonia. His zealous students called a physician from Wilna. But the foundation of his physical being had already been undermined, and by no mortal physician could it now be repaired. On September 12, 1933, the Hafetz Hayim passed away.

From all over the country, by foot and car and train, men came to pay homage at his funeral. Tens

of thousands followed slowly, weeping their sorrow, for this light of Israel which would shine no more.

But, like a star that disappears from the sky, and leaves a lasting path of brightness in its wake, in its place was now a luminous glow—a glow that would send its far-reaching beams down to the hearts of men, to gladden and strengthen them for all time.

PART TWO



ON THE

TEACHINGS

OF

THE HAFETZ HAYIM



CHAPTER I

A TEACHER OF THE PEOPLE

Glory attained in old age usually has its foundation in youth. "The wisdom of the wise increases with age; the older the wiser," asserts the Talmud. Himself a student all his life, Rabbi Israel Meir gradually gained recognition as the foremost religious teacher of his people.

To be so acclaimed is the highest possible tribute in Israel. *Rabbenu*, our teacher, is a title conferred upon Moses, the greatest Jew of all generations. In recognition of Rabbi Judah *HaNasi's* merits as scholar and educator, the people called him "Rabbi" or *Rabbenu Hakadosh*. Later, his disciple R. Abba in Babylon, as the foremost teacher of the diaspora, (*Rabban Shel Kal Bene Hagolah*) was called *Rav*, without his patronymic.

Were it not for the universal acclaim that the name of *Hafetz Hayim* had gained for him, the title *Rabbi* or *Rabbenu* would undoubtedly have been adopted as Reb Israel Meir's proper name.

The works of the *Hafetz Hayim* deal with practical principles of right and wrong, that are the concern of man's daily life and conduct.

"How happy a Jew ought to feel, when upon

rising every morning, he finds a definite code of principles to regulate his entire conduct for the whole day," he once remarked.

Among the voluminous and varied Hebrew books of the Hafetz Hayim there are: *Mishnah Berurah*, *Abavath Hesed*, *Shem Olam*, *Nidche Yisrael*, *Asifath Zekenim*, *Torath Cobanim*, *Lekute Halachoth*, and others. He appears not only as a zealous preacher of ethics and morality, inspiring his readers to loyalty to God and the love of justice, but as a gigantic intellect, towering high above his contemporaries. The *Mishnah Berurah* on the Code "The Way of Life" (*Orach Hayim*) has indeed become a standard book for daily use by the entire community. Therein are defined and interpreted the laws and customs of Israel as formulated in the codes of Jacob *Baal Haturim*, Joseph Caro, Moses Isserles, and their successors, with his criticism of previous commentators, and his own decisions, derived from the Talmud and from the vast post-Talmudic literature.

His chief gaonic work, however, is the *Lekute Halachoth*. It is a condensed *halachic* collection, summarizing the talmudic discussions of those laws and customs not treated by the great teacher Rabbi Isaac ben Jacob Alfasi (1013-1103) in his *Halachoth*.

The latter, though called the author of the "Little Talmud," confined his compilation to practical *halachoth* only, omitting those treatises dealing with laws binding only in Palestine. The Hafetz Hayim supplemented Alfasi by his works on the *Seder*

Kadashim, and on codes based upon the books of Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Moreover, he wrote commentaries upon his own compilation, as *Rabbenu* Nissim and others commented on the work of Alfasi.

To the Hafetz Hayim the coming of the Messiah, the redemption of Israel, the restoration of *Eretz Yisrael*, and a rebuilt Temple on Mt. Moriah, were practicable objects. He deemed their realization a matter of the near future, and made all preparation necessary for the Messiah's advent. He organized the *cobanim*; influenced them to study the necessary laws pertaining to the service of the Temple; and also instituted a school for the dissemination of such knowledge.

He was, however, aware that the masses did not share his faithful conviction.

The Hafetz Hayim used as illustration the story related of Rabbi Joseph Ber Soloveitchik, who, after resigning from the rabbinical leadership of Slutzk, was determined again not to accept any call. He made his residence in Warsaw. In the year 1869, a committee from Brest-Litovsk came to notify Rabbi Soloveitchik that he had been unanimously elected rabbi of their city. But Rabbi Joseph Ber declined. The spirited pleas of the committee seemed ineffective. As they were about to leave in disappointment, one of them at last pleaded with flowing tears: "*Rebbe*, how can you let a community of 25,000 people wait for you in vain?"

These few simple words had the desired effect—they touched the rabbi's heart. And Rabbi Soloveitchik immediately asked for his hat and coat, saying: "I must go along with the committee—I can't bear to let 25,000 Jews wait for me."

When the Hafetz Hayim finished this story a sigh came from the depth of his heart and tears welled in his eyes. He concluded: "We Jews have been assured by the Almighty through His prophets that the Messiah is bound to come. Imagine if we awaited his coming with such anxiety as the people of Brest did for their rabbi; if we but anticipated his arrival so earnestly, he would not delay his appearance for a moment. Alas! we do not wait for him!"

All his works prove comprehensive and thorough, his explanations simple, concise and lucid; his style is clear and elegant, his language being a pure Hebrew or simple Yiddish. He always avoided casuistry and hair splitting dialectics. His books, disseminated and studied practically everywhere, have given rise to countless societies, stimulating and inspiring religious activities in every field of Jewish endeavor.

Moreover, the fact that the Hafetz Hayim was a *cohen*, in whose veins flowed the blood of Aaron—whose children have been predestined "to teach His ordinances to Jacob, and His law to Israel"—has undoubtedly given great impetus to the cultivation of his illustrious qualities as teacher and authority in Israel.

CHAPTER II

A LIVING EXAMPLE

It is related that Shumor, writer of Yiddish novels, once introduced himself to a well-known rabbi as an author. "So you are an author! What kind of books do you write?" Thereupon Shumor drew from his bosom his latest work, entitled *The Defiant Renegade* (*Meshumad Le'haachis*). The rabbi glanced at him askance. "Well, well, my dear man, you have created a queer monument for yourself. As you know, it is customary among Jews to call the author after the name of his book, also to inscribe the adopted name on the tombstone. Thus we have: 'Here rests the Magen Avraham, the Pene Yehoshua, the Peri Megadim, etc.' Whereas your tombstone will bear the inscription 'Here Rests The Defiant Renegade.'"¹

This is a striking characteristic of Jewish tradition. Few people are familiar with the names of Israel Lipschitz, Yom Tov Lipman Heller, Abraham Dan-

1. A similar anecdote is related of Jacob HaLevi Sapir, author of the Hebrew book *Even Sapir*, meaning "The Precious Jewel." Once while quarreling with Peretz Smolenskin, the famous author of the Hebrew novel *Kevurath Hamor*, ("The Burial of the Ass"), Sapir exclaimed, "Behold, Peretz, the difference between you and me. When I shall die they will inscribe upon my tombstone, 'Here lies the *Even Sapir*.' Whereas your tombstone will contain the epitaph 'Here is *The Burial of the Ass*.'"

zig, Jonathan Eibshutz, Ezekiel Landau, or Moses Schreiber. But many, however, know who were the "*Tifereth Israel*", "*Tosefot Yom Tov*", "*Haye Adam*", "*Urim Vetumim*", "*Noda B'yehudah*", or "*Chasam Sefer*."

This is particularly true of Rabbi Israel Meir HaCohen, universally known as the Hafetz Hayim, the title of his first book.

Such a tradition has a deep significance. It indicates the inseparability of the author's very life from his work. The author was expected to be an embodiment of the principles he expounded. Or perhaps, his book was to portray his personal experiences, an autobiography of his thoughts, feeling, and behavior. The traditional Jewish author has been judged not by the ethics and ideals he professed, but by the ethics and ideals he personally effectuated and lived up to.

This, of course, deviates from the layman's conception that the book is but the masterpiece of the author; that its art is but a result of his inherent or cultivated talents, and therefore need not express his personal experiences or describe the intimacies of his own behavior.

Leading geniuses in art, literature, and philosophy are seldom acclaimed as models of moral demeanor. With due respect to their vision and keen insight into the most complicated problems, they nevertheless fail to turn their searchlight toward their own personalities. In the majority of cases they themselves

remain aloof from the ideal standards they so passionately set up for others.

Indeed, a contradiction between theory and practice, between thought and reality, between speech and action, is an experience utterly alien to the Jewish spirit. "The scholar whose inner life does not harmonize with his external conduct (his knowledge with his practice) is no scholar," the Talmud declares.

Judaism condemns the assumption of mere surface polish. It considers of little value a piety which is artificial and not prompted from the innermost recesses of heart and soul. "Only such instruction as comes from the depth of one's heart is capable of penetrating another's heart."

Strange as this may seem to the secular mind, it is, however, a matter of fact that the true Jewish teacher has taught his followers not by means of words alone, but by personal example of the virtues, goodness, modesty, and piety demanded of the disciples. "The student who does not grasp the beauty and value of the Torah becomes a renegade," the Hafetz Hayim used to say.

It is no exaggeration to state that no author has ever exemplified his teachings in a more explicit and impressive manner than did Rabbi Israel Meir.

Rightly did Chief Rabbi Grodzensky remark, "The Hafetz Hayim was spiritually superior to us by six generations; three generations he himself was, and three generations we are inferior to that of our immediate predecessors."

Furthermore, his profound erudition gained him recognition even outside the ranks of his co-religionists. Nay, it even penetrated the ranks of the irreligious. During the war, while a refugee in Russia, he was esteemed and respected by the atheistic communists. Several years ago, the president of Poland, Moscicki, paid him homage by visiting him in his little town and receiving his blessing.

Dr. Jacob Smithline of Brooklyn, during the summer of 1927, sent the Hafetz Hayim a check of one hundred dollars as a gift. The rabbi, of course, refused to accept it. His reply is a striking example of his unusual modesty and piety. It says in part that the doctor must have erred in sending him the check. In all probability he must have presumed that his beneficiary was a great scholar and saint; but the latter was sorry to assert that the contrary was true. He was neither a scholar nor a saint. More even than money, he lacked devotion and piety.

The Hafetz Hayim loved his Yeshivah with every fibre of his heart. He felt proud of her distinguished scholars. Yet when a student faction quarreled with one of the instructors, the Hafetz Hayim rebuked them most severely. He declared that he would rather see the destruction of his beloved institution, than allow strife and friction to exist within its walls.

Judaism is fundamentally a religion of practice rather than a system of speculation and intellectuality. Its philosophy tends to elevate everyday life and make all its endeavors ideal and worthwhile. It

is the Jewish conception that education ought to be related to life, that knowledge and wisdom can be perfect only if translated into practice. This was directly stated by the sages: "Study alone is not the principal thing, unless it be accompanied by practice." Also: "Study is of great value because it leads to practice."²

These ancient talmudic dicta hold good as the criterion of Jewish learning. Moreover, our sages also maintained, "He whose learning fails to influence his daily experiences of life should better not have been born." Jewish life has thus become molded in accordance with the inspiring teachings of Judaism. Its philosophy embraces all functions and processes of human life.

As a true representative of that spirit, Rabbi Israel Meir was a living code of ethics and morals—a walking *Shulchan Aruch*, in the truest and purest meaning of that thought.

2. *Aboth* I, 17; *Baba Kama*, 17a.

CHAPTER III

HIS UNSWERVING FAITH

The Hafetz Hayim has been an inexhaustible reservoir of faith. His pure and serene faith prompted his every move, exalted his every breath and desire. He was unsurpassed in his firmness. However, his was not a blind belief. Reason to him was not in opposition to faith, but rather a means of enlightenment and clarification. His zeal and vision convinced him of the absolute truth and efficacy of Judaism. Like the light of day which needs no proof of its existence and importance, so he deemed the principles of Jewish tradition. The scientist at his laboratory could not feel more convinced of his theories than the saint in his belief. To him every religious problem was solvable and comprehensible. Even such problems as the future world, of reward and punishment, were within reach of his perspective.

Every new invention, every new discovery meant but another manifestation of the divine presence. The telephone, telegraph, and radio, with their power to transmit sound and to convey messages and photographs from one end of the globe to the other, bear

testimony to the possibility that an exact copy of man's words and deeds are recorded in Heaven.

Of one of his visits to the city of Moscow, in the interests of the Yeshivah, the following anecdote is related: In his room at a hotel, the Hafetz Hayim was occupied in conversation with a prominent communal leader, from whom he sought to obtain a substantial donation. Rabbi Hirsh Levinson (the Hafetz Hayim's son-in-law and dean of the Yeshivah), was busy in another corner of the room composing a telegram. The philanthropist remonstrated that there were some wealthy people in the city richer than himself who had refrained from giving. As he was about to mention names, the Hafetz Hayim stopped him with a remark, "Don't you see my son-in-law Reb Hirsh over there, counting each and every word, weighing and measuring every phrase? Do you know why he does it? Because later he will have to pay for every expression. So, my dear friend, we too will have to give account for each and every word we utter. Let us, therefore, avoid talking about others."

The automobile, the airplane, as means of speedy transportation, help to abolish the artificial boundaries and divisions between one people and another. This, according to Rabbi Israel Meir, is but another manifestation of the work of Providence in realization of the prophecy that mankind is about to become one brotherhood; the Almighty will be recognized by all mankind as sole master of the universe, and the earth

will be filled with knowledge of God, as the waters fill the sea.

True, strife and hatred still dominate the world. Dark clouds cover the human horizon. People today abuse the new inventions—using them as instruments of destruction rather than construction. But to the Hafetz Hayim, this was even a stronger manifestation of the approach of the millennium. The divine system of ruling the universe was demonstrated at the very beginning of creation. “In the beginning, before God created the heavens and earth, darkness reigned upon the face of the deep; and God said, Let there be light, and there was light”—“But,” say the sages, “light and darkness still ruled together in confusion, until God established a division between them, the light ruling the day and darkness the night.” “Such,” argued the Hafetz Hayim, “will finally be the fate of humanity. Confusion will disappear, making place for the light of true faith and knowledge throughout the globe.”

He was also wont to declare: the telescope keeps on revealing new worlds which have heretofore been unknown to us; so why deny the possibility that there are other worlds which even our most improved telescope cannot depict?

Indeed, science in proving natural law is at the same time proving the immanence of an intelligence permeating the universe and pervading every atom and molecule of it. Many an eminent scientist now admits that the multitude of phenomena in the world

are not susceptible to a purely physical measurement, that there is a vital force and free will looking after everything, from the mite of a sunbeam and the way-side flower to the sweep of constellations and the rise of empires.¹

The admiration of the Hafetz Hayim for the usual occurrences in nature was as great as for the unusual ones. He deemed that the real achievement

1. The deeper one delves into a given subject the more astounded he becomes at the discovery of new pathways leading toward other unknown worlds. Professor Einstein, the world's foremost scientist, is reported to have remarked: "All our knowledge is but the knowledge of school children." It is amazing how the most celebrated leaders in the so-called "pure" sciences—mathematics, physics, chemistry and astronomy—those who have revolutionized our conceptions, one after the other are becoming the exponents of a new trend of scientific thought—drifting away from a mechanistic to a spiritual interpretation of nature (vitalism). Their theory is gradually gaining force and volume among the physicists and biologists of our era.

"Everything in the universe dates back to a definite creation at some remote time," says Sir James Jeans.

"Everything that we learn from the observational point of view in the study of astronomy seems to me to point precisely and always toward a New World—a spiritual world which interacts with the known material world, but is not part of it," is a prediction of Sir Oliver Lodge.

"Man, by employing a scientific approach to religion, has learned that his God is one, who rules the universe by set definite laws. Man therefore looks upon himself no longer as being the plaything of blind fate, but has become a free agent in his own future by learning of this law and bringing himself into harmony with it."—Dr. Robert A. Millikan.

"I assert that the cosmic religious experience is the strongest and noblest driving force behind science," says Prof. Albert Einstein. When asked his opinion as to whether man will ever be able to probe the secrets of the heavens, Einstein is reported to have remarked: "Possibly we shall know a little more than we do now; but the real nature of things, that we shall never know, never."

Concerning the unfathomable mysteries of the universe, Newton once remarked: "I do not know what I may appear to the world, but to myself I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the seashore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a prettier shell, or a smoother pebble than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me."

of the human spirit rests on a comprehension of that which is steady and ordinary, upon an understanding of the so-called everyday miracles in life, rather than upon an appreciation of the rare and extraordinary phenomena.

The Hafetz Hayim saw the magnitude and grandeur of divine wisdom in every breath about him. He held that a wise and intelligent observer can find unusualness in the usual, discover strangeness in the most familiar events, and see the veils of mystery surrounding the best known things. Only a man of poorly developed capacity fails to appreciate the familiarities about him; only he whose vision is dimmed and mind lacking in penetration seeks miracles beyond his immediate ken.

As illustration, the Hafetz Hayim once related an incident about the saintly Rabbi Israel Salanter, who spent his last years in Koenigsburg, Germany. Salanter was introduced by an acquaintance to some young people who were his guests. When the men learned of Rabbi Israel's greatness, of his religious zeal and profound erudition, they changed the subject of their conversation to a discussion on religion. One of them asked the rabbi why God had ceased to perform miracles in these days. They assured the rabbi that a miracle would strengthen their religious conceptions and would make better Jews of them. They continued arguing until interrupted by the host, who entered carrying a gold medal. He related with pride that this was the prize his daughter had received the

preceding day on graduating from the academy of dancing, and that she had been the only one to receive such a distinction. "You ought to see the ovation she received after her performance! The public went wild over her skill."

The rabbi, listening with interest, requested that the talented daughter perform her art before them, as he was very anxious to see her dance.

The father looked in surprise at the rabbi. "You, my dear rabbi, most probably do not comprehend the nature of this art; such a performance requires special scenery in a fitting stage decoration, and an accompaniment of music. Also the inspiration of an eager audience, for art is a God-given talent which must not be abused. However, if you wish to convince yourself of her distinction, here is the medal which she received from the Academy."

"That is so, that is so; I should have thought of that," the rabbi apologized.

He then turned to the assembly and said, "Think—this girl needs a suitable stage and scenery in order to display her talents. Yet of God you demand that he provide miracles to the tastes and desires of your heart. The Exodus from Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, the journey in the wilderness, the conquest of Palestine, provided the necessary stage and scenery for the divine performance of miracles. However, to him who wishes to acquaint himself with the wonders of the Almighty, behold the countless miracles

He performs continuously in the daily course of nature!"

The Hafetz Hayim continued:

"This, state the sages, sums up the whole Torah. The Almighty's dominion over the entire world, His omnipotence and omnipresence, constitute the essence of our daily praise and benedictions. We are required to have complete faith in Divine Providence. He who denies this belief and says that God has forsaken the earth or that He is no longer concerned with the fate of every individual, or that He is indifferent to the existence of even a single creature, or careless about the tiniest of His infinitesimal beings, is drifting away from pure faith toward idolatry.

"Man's over-estimation of his own worth breeds dissatisfaction. As long as one deems himself entitled to possess more and more in this world and an ample share in the future, he cannot help feeling unhappy.

"On the other hand, if he realizes that the Almighty in His infinite wisdom knows just how much he deserves, and how much is good for him and his children, he will always feel happy and satisfied. Humility is the seed of contentment, and a necessary faculty leading to loyalty and faith.

"The acid test of pure faith is the Torah, which is divine in its substance and heavenly in its origin. The revealed truth of the Torah is steady, and does not depend at all upon scientific experimentation or philosophical speculation. Science ought to seek verification of its alleged truths in the Torah rather

than vice versa. Among the numerous examples that may prove the infallibility of the Torah is the fact that the events foreseen by the prophets have all been working out to the letter exactly as predicted and interpreted by the sages. One needs but view the ruins of Babylon, Assyria, Greece, and Rome, to see how each iota of Biblical vision has been fulfilled."

Once the Hafetz Hayim remarked: "How do we know that the sun will rise tomorrow? Because the Torah declares, 'Day and night they shall not cease!'"

In summary—faith, according to the Hafetz Hayim, ought to permeate every nook and crevice of man's wisdom and master his entire intellect, for the rays of faith shed light upon all phenomena of nature. Faith, coming from the innermost chambers of the human heart and inspired by the profound vision of his soul, is a consummation of human knowledge and understanding.

The Hafetz Hayim was completely imbued with the spirit of belief in and love for God. He was unquestioningly trustful in divine justice and compassion and absolutely loyal and obedient to God's precepts and ordinances. He was patient with human shortcomings. Though profoundly modest, he impressed everyone with a feeling of spiritual grandeur, exalted above the petty ambitions and egotistic endeavors of human life.

He spent every moment of his life worthily, never frittering away his time. Plain living and pro-

found thinking marked his character. His ambition was to inculcate divine knowledge in every human heart, to elevate the simple folk.

On his lips was the beautiful passage from the psalmist: "Whither shall I go from Thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend to Heaven, Thou art there: If I make my bed in hell, Thou art there: If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall Thy hand lead me and Thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me and the light about me shall be night. Yet even darkness obscureth nothing from Thee; but the night shineth like the day. Darkness and light are both alike. When I wake, I still am with Thee" (139).

And he then concluded with the prayer of a saint as quoted by Bachya ibn Paquda in his "Duties of the Heart."

"My God, Thou hast brought upon me starvation and penury. Into the depth of darkness Thou hast driven me, and Thy might and strength hast Thou taught me. But even if they burn me in fire only the more will I love Thee and rejoice in Thee, for says the Torah, 'And thou shalt love thy God with all thy heart.'"¹

1. Edit. Slutzky, p. 127a.

CHAPTER IV

THE EVIL TONGUE

The writer recalls an instance which he himself witnessed, and which demonstrates the summit of piety the Hafetz Hayim achieved in the government of his tongue.

One of his household related that when Mr. M. had visited their home, he had told a self-reproachful story. "Please stop talking evil about others. I have plenty of my own defects to talk about!" the saint indignantly protested. The relator then apologized by saying that Mr. M. himself had told the story in front of everybody. "Nevertheless, you must not repeat it, for though one may like to assail himself, yet he never likes to be assailed by others."

He added that talking evil even of an animal might sometimes cause a calamity to a human family.

Once there was a man who derived his livelihood from driving a horse and wagon.

One of his neighbors opined that his horse was scrawny and feeble. The news spread throughout the community. People began to avoid employing the driver. As a result the latter, together with his large family, were subjected to penury and starvation.

Thus it followed that slandering a horse caused the death of eight human souls.

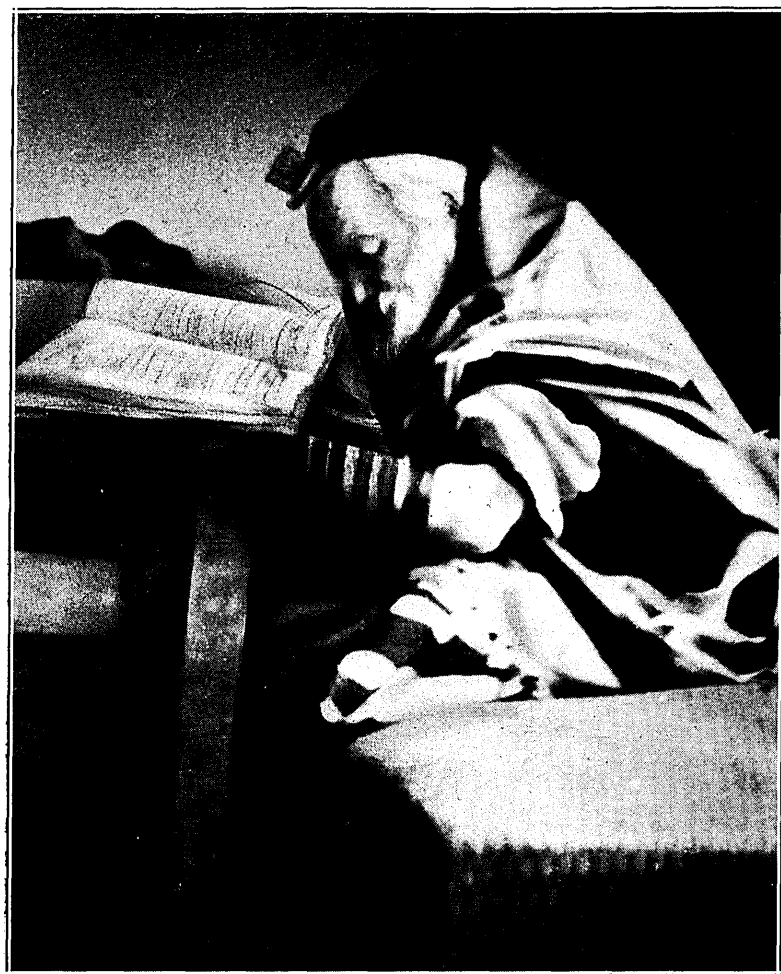
In his books (*Hafetz Hayim*, *Shemirath Halashon*, *Hovath Hashemirah*, and *Zachor L'Miriam*) the Hafetz Hayim dwells on the various phases and angles of calumny and talebearing. He makes a diagnosis of this social disease. After summarizing the characteristic symptoms and motives he suggests the remedies. In his prefatory note to the first fruit of his pen (*Hafetz Hayim*) he states in part:

"I have thus pondered—if men will read this book of mine, which contains the declarations of our early writings on this matter, and will fully comprehend its contents, then the evil inclination will not prevail over them, and bring them to this dreadful iniquity.

"By accustoming oneself little by little to fight off this inclination one will ultimately rid oneself of the evil altogether."

The author provides a thorough discussion of the laws concerning the evil tongue, which includes making slighting remarks about a neighbor, or talebearing—the act of informing a third party of the evil that someone has spoken or performed against him. He quotes from the sages:

"Many are prone to theft and a few to incontinence, but all to slander, for if there be found one who is not chargeable with slander in a direct manner, he surely has not escaped from the dust of slander



THE HAFETZ HAYIM IN JUNE, 1932

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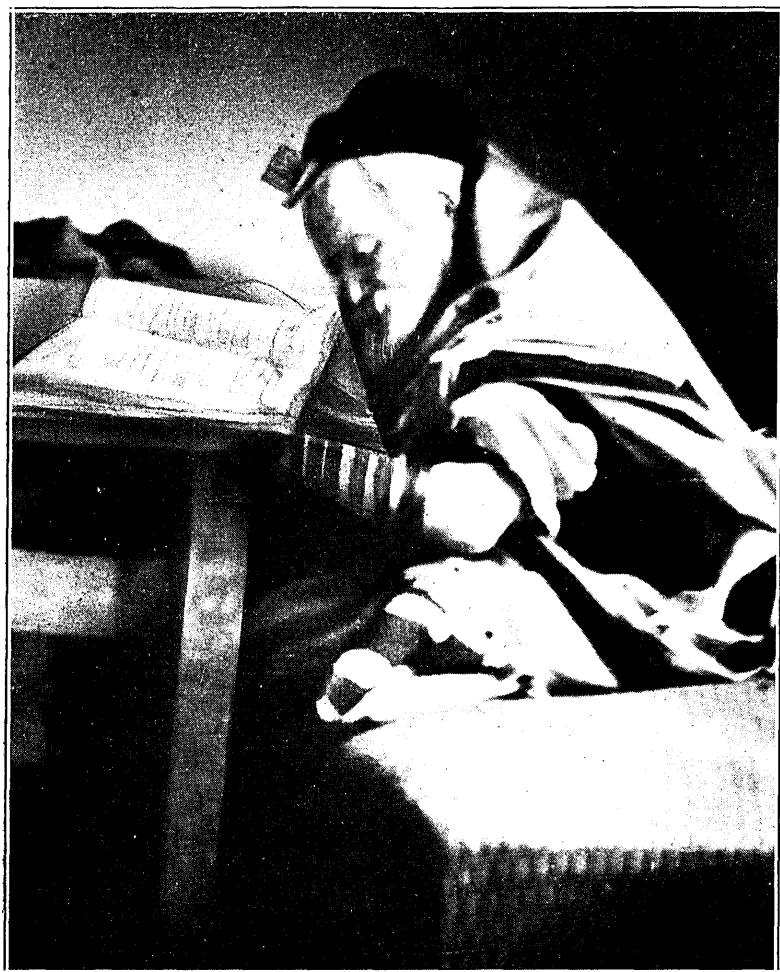
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THE HAFETZ HAYIM IN JUNE, 1932

(*Avok Lashon Hara*) ; that is, they are guilty of some shade of the offense.”¹

Also: “Let no man praise another too much, for excess of praise may provoke the disclosing of something to the other’s discredit.”² After summarizing many Biblical and Talmudic records, the author concludes:

“The iniquities arising from an evil tongue undermine the moral order of creation. Israel’s dispersion and the prolongation of their exile are attributed to this guilt. It was as a result of this crime that Israel went down into Egypt. For it is said of Joseph, who spent his time with his half brothers: ‘And Joseph brought evil reports of them unto his father.’³ As retribution, Heaven decreed that Joseph be taken to Egypt as a slave. The chief iniquity of the spies, according to *Rashi* and *Rambam*, was the evil tongue. They brought false reports concerning the promised land. Because on that day, which was the ninth of Ab, they shed hypocritical tears, it was decreed that *Tisha B’ab* become a day of mourning. On it they were to be driven out of their Promised Land, and dispersed throughout the world.

“The City of Bethar was destroyed because of evil statements carried to *Bar Cochba*. Our great martyrs went to their death for similar reasons.

“The evil tongue causes the divine presence to

1. *Baba Batra*, 165a.

2. *Arakhim*, 16a.

3. Gen. XXXVII. 2.

depart from Israel. The declaration, 'Cursed be he who smiteth his neighbor in secret,' applies to the dissemination of calumny.

"He who spreads evil with his tongue magnifies iniquity unto heaven. As it is said: 'They set their mouths in the heavens and their tongues walketh busily on earth.'⁴ This means that though the tongue wags on earth it has its effects on high."

The author quotes Maimonides: "Although culprits are not lashed for violating this prohibition, it remains a great sin, in so far as it may cause the loss of many souls in Israel. For this reason, the law against the evil tongue is found near the words, 'Thou shalt not stand by the blood of thy neighbor.'"⁵ He then continues:

"Although there are many other wicked attributes mentioned by the Torah, such as undue wrath, cruelty, and levity, which are harmful to the soul's beauty, yet only the crime of the evil tongue is actually included as one of the negative provisions of the 613 commandments of Judaism. It is obvious that the Torah made a strong effort to restrain us from this tremendous sin by stating definitely: 'Thou shalt not go up and down the land as a talebearer among thy people.'"

"The receiver as well as the spreader of tales is guilty of transgressing the negative command. 'Before the blind shalt thou place no stumbling block.'

4. Psalms LXXIII, 9

5. Lev. XIX, 16.

For those who listen to tales make talebearers possible.

"The repeated employment of the evil tongue may be compared to a silk thread, strengthened by the use of hundreds of strands. Thus, this sin, which is in itself most grievous, is made ever stronger through the many occasions on which it is repeated.

"When Reuben tells Simeon, 'Levi has said things about you,' Reuben transgresses by repeating evil reports, and Simeon by believing them. Thereafter Simeon meets Levi and begins to revile him—another transgression. Levi asks why he is being assailed, and Simeon blurts out that Reuben has told him all (again the crime of talebearing). Upon which Levi is at pains to explain his true words, intimating that Reuben's story is not a truthful one. Then, when Simeon again meets with Reuben, he angrily denounces Reuben for having brought about the quarrel with Levi. Thereupon Reuben says, 'Come with me; together we shall make the charge against Levi; we shall know the truth.' This is done; Levi blanches, and admits saying these things, but declares that the interpretation and stress on his words are faulty. Simeon replies, 'Now, if you denied them a thousand times, I would not believe you!'

"Thus does one transgression mount on another when one begins the grievous sin of talebearing.

"The evil inclination employs various methods in preventing man from restraining his tongue. The ordinary man is left under the wrong impression that to talk evil is only prohibited in matters of falsehood.

On the other hand, the learned man who is fully aware that even in matters of truth this sin is banned, is frequently made to believe either that the particular thing said does not fall in that category, or that the Torah did not mean to apply to a man such as this one. And if a man's wicked nature cannot overcome his scruples in these ways, it overwhelms him so greatly with widespread evidences of the evil tongue as to convince him that practically all intercourse may fall within that designation, and that therefore one can not live the life of an ordinary human on earth without employing it. This is the sly wisdom of the serpent, telling Eve, 'Hath God indeed said, ye shall not eat of every tree in the garden?'

"Leprosy, the most dreadful disease to the ancients, according to our sages, was inflicted as a punishment for the sin of slander. The Biblical phrase, 'This shall be the law of the leper (*metzora*)' the Talmud paraphrased, 'This shall be the law of him who spreads slander' (*motzi-ra*). Like leprosy, slander is slightly perceptible at the beginning. An inclination for prattle, a ready ear for gossip leads to mischief and scandal. In a moral sense a slanderous tongue is as contagious and detrimental as leprosy is physically. Says the Midrash, 'Because the slanderer separated husband from wife, and brother from brother, and friend from friend, he is afflicted with the disease which separates him from society. Just as the venom of a serpent affects every part of the body, so does the leprosy of calumny wound the soul of

mankind, and as the virus of the viper injures from a distance, so slander may be hissed forth by one living in Rome to slay one living in Syria.'

"'Only a change of his evil habit and an atonement for his sins caused by his chattering may help the talebearer to return into society. On the day of his purification the Torah commands the leper to bring in atonement, two birds. These birds symbolize his evil tongue. As the birds chirp and chatter, so did he babble and prattle. The voice of the bird shall thus affect forgiveness for the voice of calumny.'"

This is illustrated in the Midrash by the following episode: "Once a certain peddler went from town to town and shouted, 'Who wants to buy the elixir of life?' When Rabbi Janai heard of this strange article for sale he offered to buy it. The peddler replied: 'This is not for you, nor for sages like you.' But when the rabbi insisted, the pack-peddler drew out the Book of Psalms and pointed to the thirty-fourth chapter, verse thirteen: 'Who is the man who desireth life? Keep thy tongue from evil and thy lips from speaking guile.' 'This,' added the peddler, 'is the elixir of life.'

"Therefore," concludes the Midrash, "Moses says, 'This shall be the law of the leper—the law for him who spreads slander.'"

"Who is honored? He who honors others."

6. Leviticus R. XIV. 2.

7. *Aboth* IV, 1.

Hafetz Hayim interpreted this to imply that a person must be prompt in honoring all men, for therein he proves himself worthy of honor. A quotation which he used frequently was from the Testament of Judah ben Asher: "A sage said that he found reason for honoring almost everyone he knew. 'I have never come across one in whom I failed to recognize superiority over myself. Were he older, I have said he has done more good than I; were he richer, I said he has been more charitable; were he younger, I said I have sinned more; were he poorer, I said he has suffered heavier tribulation; were he wiser, I honored him for his wisdom; were he not wiser, I said his fault is the lighter.'"

The Hafetz Hayim particularly admonished his followers to train themselves to think before they speak, utter words if they be profitable, suppress them if they would profit nothing, and maintain silence if there be the slightest possibility that they would in any manner cause the least suffering to others. As Rabbi Simon ben Gamliel said: "All my days I have grown up among the wise and I have not found anything better for a person than silence." ⁸

8. *Aboth* I, 17.

CHAPTER V OF PRAYER

There is a legend that when God had completed the creation of the Universe, He asked one of the angels if anything was lacking on land or sea, in air or in heaven. The angel replied that all was perfect, but one thing he desired—the power of speech to extol God's handiwork. The Almighty, approving the angel's request, created man and endowed him with the faculty of expressing his thoughts and feelings. "It is God's peculiar work to benefit and His creatures' work to give Him thanks" (Philo Judeus).

Man in his earliest antiquity is known to have used prayer as the spiritual articulation of his inner yearnings. The principal heroes and characters of the Bible are found to have indulged in prayer; whether as a mode of supplication in distress and want, or as a mode of praise and thanksgiving amidst prosperity and joyous exaltation, or as an aspiration toward communion and celestial bliss. Prayer is the expression and reliance of the human heart upon a power that is supreme in its strength and wisdom and whose compassion is infinite. As the babe nestles in the bosom of its mother, so does the soul of man in its helplessness seek shelter and security in the bosom of God.

Says the Hafetz Hayim:¹

"Prayer according to our sages, is one of the three fundamentals upon which the Almighty based His creation. According to the prophets it replaces the sacrifices of the Holy Temple, as it is stated: 'The offering of our lips shall replace the bullocks.'² The exhortation 'to serve God with all the heart' is interpreted in the Talmud to imply the duty of prayer.'³

"Alas, today many of our people have neglected and some even completely abandoned the precious and beautiful tradition of prayer. Every sin brings another in its wake. And in this case, if we fail to pray, it follows that we shall also fail to lay the *tefillin*, which is one of the three signs that bind Israel to the Creator (the other two being Sabbath and circumcision).

"The servants of an earthly ruler take pride in wearing his coat of arms as a token of their allegiance, and are guilty of treason if they discard it. How much more are we to take pride in our distinction as servants of the King of Kings and wear the insignia of Israel—the *tefillin* which has the name of *Shaddai* (Almighty) on it. Those who disregard the *tefillin* are therefore considered as sinners and forfeit the protection of the Almighty.

"The Jew who upon arising dons his *tefillin* and *tzitzith* and begins his daily routine with his morning

1. *Nidche Yisrael*, chapter 5; *Beth Yisrael*, chapter 1.

2. Hosea 14, 3.

3. *Sifri* Deut. XI, 13; *Maim. Hilchoth Tefillah* I, 1.

prayers will surely feel its moral influence during the whole day. Fastened to his moorings by the anchor of his prayer he will prove secure against the surging billows of temptation. Strengthened in his faith that it is God who sustains and provides for us all, he will hardly ever fall a prey to his passions. He will then sooner pursue the paths of integrity and honesty in his dealings with his fellow men.

"One of the most effective instruments for stimulating and preserving the Jewish consciousness is public service⁴ performed at the synagogue. Such an experience promotes personal devoutness and aids the individual to mount a higher plane of solemnity and inspiration. Nay, its merit is even of a farther reaching significance. By attending the synagogue the Jew manifests his loyalty to God and his identity with the life, history and religion of the Jewish people.'

"For the synagogue, besides being a rallying communal center keeping aglow all that is vital, precious and sacred in Israel, serves as a dynamic symbol that the Almighty is ever near his children, ever ready to listen to their prayers, to extend help and consolation to the weary and needy, to solace and comfort the suffering and distressed and to inspire with faith and hope the doubting and perplexed. The absolute unity

4. When the community at large prays it is called a time of favor. "The Holy One, blessed be He, despiseth not the prayers of a community"—*Berachoth* 8a.

5. Affiliation with the synagogue was declared by the sages to be a sign of neighborliness. "Whoever lives near a place where there is a synagogue and fails to join it is a bad neighbor"—*Berachoth* 8a.

of the Eternal, the oneness of the ideal trinity of Torah, God, and Israel, has always been the primary teaching of this hallowed institution—the synagogue.”

Indeed, as a vital impetus to prayer and study, to all spiritual and intellectual endeavors, the synagogue has been bound up with the history, civilization and culture of the Jewish people. It tells of a long chain of seers and sages, of savants and prophets, of legislators and scribes, of poets and philosophers, of gigantic intellects and geniuses pre-eminent in all fields of human achievement. It tells the history of countless martyrs and saints who sacrificed their very lives and possessions rather than abandon their loyalty to their faith.

None ever excelled the Hafetz Hayim in his habitual promptness of attending the early morning services every day at the synagogue. He was almost always of the earliest worshippers, first to come and last to leave the synagogue. Once, because of a very complicated talmudic discourse which he sought to solve, he arose before dawn to study. He then became so absorbed in his meditations that it made him late for the congregational services. This he deeply regretted. “People may think that I was too lazy to rise in time, or that I am somehow negligent in the fulfillment of my duties toward the Eternal, blessed be He. It might cause a *Hillul Hashem* (the profanation of His holy Name)!” He then ascended the pulpit and made a public apology after having explained the cause of his lateness.

Simplicity, the predominating quality of the Hafetz Hayim's personal conduct, was also manifested in his prayers. He recited his prayers plainly and simply, as a child addresses a petition to his father. Though he uttered each word with his peculiar sincerity and devotion, he did not pretend to emulate the quaint hassidic ecstasy, the mysticism and subtle symbolism of the cabbalist.

When depressed and suffering people came to him, requesting that he intercede with God in their behalf, he answered, sympathetically, that he saw no reason why they needed a go-between; why not pray themselves to Him who is near to all who call upon Him in truth? "As a rule, a father," he explained, "prefers that each and every one of his children appear in person to ask for his favor rather than through the medium of his brother. So it is with our Heavenly Father in bestowing His bounty upon His children. He, too, prefers direct contact. Even if you feel estranged from Him," he would continue, "I assure you that God, in His infinite goodness and love for His creatures, is waiting for you to return. Hence, you alone may, if you but earnestly attempt it, attain personal communion with your Father in Heaven. Do it now. Why postpone it for the morrow? . . ."

Besides his usual congregational worship, the Hafetz Hayim set a special hour every day for spiritual self-introspection. Midnight, with its awe-inspiring silence and atmosphere of utter isolation, he chose as a favorable moment for a spiritual account-

ing. With contrite heart and downcast spirit, he used to begin his penitence:

"O, thou Israel Meir, mortal and sinful creature, what good hast thou accomplished during the whole day?" He then reviewed his every act, his every move and utterance, examining them in minutest detail. After due penance and a pledge to improve his conduct, he burst into bitter tears over the grave lot repressing his people throughout the world. He wept because His Holy Name, blessed be He, was being profaned amongst the nations. Thus he continued the order of prayer for midnight (*Tikun Hatzos*).

Tennyson did not exaggerate in stating: "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of."

CHAPTER VI

A FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

In the annals of the ancients we find much talk about some mythical fountain of youth. They seem to have kept searching for it continuously. Even as late as the sixteenth century a Spanish adventurer named Ponce de Leon set out to discover that fountain, and found Florida instead.

The wastes and ruins in the ancient world are replete with statues, obelisks, tombstones, and pyramids as symbols of former triumphs and grandeurs. These people seem to have thought that through a high development of their physical powers they would achieve immortality. They therefore devoted their talents to a cultivation of plastic grace and external beauty, which of course failed to secure for them everlasting youth and vigor. It is now the common belief that nations, like individuals, blossom and grow, after which they begin to deteriorate and decay.

This holds true also of the land of Ponce de Leon. Spain at that time had attained the summit of her greatness. Her ships and cargoes reached the shores of all the Seven Seas. She was one of the world's great empires. She appears, however, to have already

felt the approach of her doom which began with the expulsion of her Jews in August, 1492. It is no wonder that she was so anxious to find the legendary fountain, to retain her youthful strength through the acquisition of new territory and wealth. But she could not arrest the inevitable process of decline, and now she is reduced to a second or third rate nation in Europe.

The Jew alone appears to have discovered the secret fountain, and it is a spiritual one—the Torah. The Torah is called *Beer Mayim Hayim*, the well-spring of living waters which has kept Israel alive and young forever. The Jewish people have survived their oppressors and outlived their enemies. They have seen their powerful adversaries rise to the pinnacle of might and glory and then crumble to dust and vanish into oblivion.

There is a talmudic legend that when at Sinai the Israelites exclaimed, "All that the Lord hath said we shall do and try to understand," the Eternal summoned the Angel of Death and said to him, "Everything is in thy power except this people."

"Because Israel is young, I love him," says the prophet. Indeed, old age cannot break the Jew. He is simultaneously old and young.

Rabbi Israel Meir typified the inexhaustible youthfulness of his people. Until his very last he did not cease to work for the strengthening of Israel's fountains of youth.

Judaism in its entirety, he deemed precious and

sacred, yet nothing kindled him with such a burning zeal, nothing aroused in him such a reservoir of youthful energy, nothing inspired him with such indomitable courage as did the task of maintaining the institutions of learning—the yeshivoth.

At the last rabbinic conference in Wilna, in the early part of 1932 which he attended, he taxed the last bit of physical vitality left to him. He came there against the advice of his physicians. In his address to the assembly he then declared:

“If I were offered a paradise of virtues, I would not have undertaken this journey, which according to my doctors was a fatal risk. Under such conditions I am released from all obligation. Yet, knowing that this assembly has to find ways and means to secure the existence of yeshivoth, I came. For the sake of the Torah I felt that I have to make the sacrifice—even of my very life.”

For more than two thousand years, the yeshivah¹ has flourished wherever Jews lived in large numbers. When the Babylonians carried the conquered Israelites into exile (422 B. C.) the unfortunates took with them stones from the ruins of Jerusalem, out of

1. There are more than a dozen names in the Talmud, either of Hebraic or Aramaic origin, by which our forefathers used to designate institutions of higher Jewish learning, such as *Kallab*—“General Assembly,” *Bayith Gadol*—“Great House,” *Beth Ulphena*—“House of Instruction,” *Kerem*—“Vineyard,” *B’Rabanan*—“House of Students.” Of all these the name yeshivah is the most popular and permanent.

The word is Hebraic in its origin; coming from the word *yashav*, to sit, thus implying a meeting, or session of scholars. It is also akin to *yishuv*, signifying settlement, society, or cultivation, as *yishuv ha’olom* or *yishuv ha’aretz*.

which they erected in Babylon a house of study and worship, known in the Talmud as *B'knishta D'shav V'yasiv*. Five hundred years later (68 C. E.) the great Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai (about 40 B. C. E. to 80 C. E.) obtained a promise from Vespasian that his belligerent Romans would spare Jabneh and its scholars. That school became the center of Judaism. Jabneh took the place of Jerusalem, fostering and maintaining the spirit of Israel unimpaired. The yeshivah has since become the repository of Jewish learning and ideals, feeding and fanning the light of the Torah, which but for it would probably long since have become extinguished. The universality and persistence of this institution as a guiding factor in Jewry is best demonstrated by its prominent position in

To many a materialist, the devout scholars of the yeshivah were considered fanatics and unsociable persons, and their occupation impracticable and unconstructive. The sages, on the other hand, deemed *derech eretz* alone, a mere workaday life without Torah, to be like the existence of a heathen or beast. Torah and *derech eretz* were to be united, in order that life be made more worthwhile and human energies directed in the proper channels of truth, wisdom, and idealism. The scholars have therefor been given recognition as *bonim*, builders of the world, or *meyashve ha'olam*, promoters of culture and civilization. They held that the whole world is indebted to him who studies the Torah devoutly; he is called a friend, beloved of God and man (*Aboth* VI, 1).

Moreover, *yishuv* also signifies sedateness, ease of mind, or profound and undisturbed thinking. *Yishuv ha'daath* implies serene meditation and reflection. *Yishuv* (sedateness of mind) is one of the forty-eight virtues that are prerequisite to the attainment of a proper knowledge of the Torah.

Yishuv also implies a fixed and comfortable settlement, especially when it comes after troublesome wandering. (See *Rashi*, Gen V, 2.) Uprooted from their native soil, considered outcasts and strangers, Jews have been forced to wander all over the world. The only stability they have experienced has been within the confines of the yeshivoth, the houses of learning and worship. Like portable sanctuaries these institutions accompanied them on their wanderings, as did the Ark of the Covenant in days of yore in the wilderness.

Jewish history. Jabneh, Tiberias, Nahardea, Sura, Pumbeditha, Cairo, Cordova, Toledo, Champagne, Paris, Padua, Worms, Frankfort, Cracow, Lublin, Wolozhin, Mir, Pressburg, Slobodka, Telzhi, Lomza, Wilna, Minsk, Jerusalem, and Radun (to mention but a few) are on the lips of every intelligent Jew, as the great seats of Jewish learning.

Thither flocked all those desirous of acquiring an intensive knowledge of the Torah, learning how "to swim in the Sea of the Talmud." They came from everywhere "to pour water on the hands," and "sit at the feet of their great masters." It was there that the voluminous works of Hebrew literature were studied "by day and by night." The subtleties of the talmudists were developed to a degree unprecedented in Jewish history. In the yeshivah, they created commentaries upon the Torah and commentaries upon commentaries—an unfathomable ocean of wisdom, a world without end. Only he who has drawn his life inspiration from the yeshivah, the serene and sacred abode of the *Shechinah*, who since the destruction of the Temple, has chosen as his dwelling the four *els* where *halachah* is studied, will comprehend and appreciate the full value of this indispensable institution.

To quote the poet:

"There are corners of our exile,
Remote, forgotten cities of dispersion,
Where still in secret burns our ancient light,
Where God has saved a remnant from disaster.

* * *

Is this the smithy then; is this the anvil
Where a people's soul is forged?
Is this the source from which the life-blood of
a people flows
To feed the generations yet unborn
And knit the thews of heroes yet to come?"²

"Studies," says Francis Bacon, "serve for delight, for ornament, and for ability." But Judaism emphasizes a loftier motive and by far a greater ideal as the purpose of learning. It was not a preparation for life and its pleasures that the historical *yeshivah-bachur* sought, nor was the rabbinate his ambition. He was primarily actuated by a desire to acquire knowledge. Considering the Torah the well and source of life, his objective was to quench the burning thirst of his soul in its waters. *Torah lishmah*, study for its own sake, he deemed the main function, the very realization of life. "The more schooling the more wisdom, the more counsel, the more understanding," has been the guiding motto for the yeshivah student. His constant study broadened the horizon of his vision, and unfolded to him the immortal and divine grandeur of life.

There is an even more vital aspect in Jewish education which is likewise an element of human growth. It was the belief of the sages that knowledge is worthless unless it expresses itself in the very life of the scholar, unless the student becomes thoroughly

1. *Hamathmid*, by H. N. Bialik.

imbued with its principles and his conduct is guided by its commanding virtues. "He is held in low esteem who, though learned, leads a life of evil."³ They considered the ideal man, one whose moral excellence was more conspicuous than his learning.

Rabbi Israel Meir was instrumental in securing the ever-flowing traditional fountains for Israel's youth. He was responsible for the founding of many schools and yeshivahs. But his main ambition was to produce scholars, whose moral life would be a translation of their studies, a perfect reflection of their knowledge. He aspired primarily at the cultivation of character, stressing the capacity of the human spirit and the potentiality of the human heart. He desired to see their lives an example of harmony between reason and sentiment, mind and emotion, thought and feeling.

3. Deut. R., VII; *Jerus. Ber.*, 1.

CHAPTER VII

ON EDUCATION

The paramount duty and most important business in life is the teaching of the young. On their proper training must needs be concentrated the main efforts and ambition of society. The salvation of humanity, the civilization of the ages, the glories of the past as well as the hopes of the future depend upon the furtherance of this ideal.

It is said, "Train the lad in the way he should go and even when he is old, he will not depart from it."¹ This passage the Hafetz Hayim interpreted as follows: "The education of the child must commence from his earliest age while his mind is still plastic and his character flexible. A systematic process of character building, of harmonizing and disciplining his mental powers ought to originate in the nursery and continue throughout the growth and development of the child. The performance of his duties in later days will then become second nature to him.

"To fall behind in this task does not merely imply a temporary hindrance which can be overcome by the child as he grows older, but an irreparable

1. Proverbs 22:6.

loss, the deficiencies of which can hardly if ever be made good. The lack of proper habits will compel him to start from the very beginning. Very often he is likely to have acquired an aptitude for evil, from which he will later find it very difficult to divorce himself."

Once, a boy, upon visiting the house of a neighbor, noticed on the mantelpiece a bottle containing a large apple. The fruit filled the entire space within. In his wonderment, how the apple could have got there, the child climbed a chair to see if the bottom of the bottle would unscrew, or if there had been a joint throughout its length. But as neither of these proved to be the case, the apple remained a mystery to him, until one day, while walking in the garden, he saw it all. On one of the trees he noticed a bottle tied thereto and within it a very tiny apple growing. The apple had been put into the bottle and there it continued its growth and cultivation.

The moral of this story, according to the Hafetz Hayim, is that we must capture our boys and girls while yet young and introduce them within the vast sphere of Jewish learning so that they may grow up therein.

The Jew takes pride in claiming a history and chain of tradition of about forty centuries. The process of Jewish history is practically interwoven with almost every people and country on earth. The student of Jewish history is thus given a view of the rise and decline of ancient Egypt, Assyria, Babylon,

Persia, Greece, and Rome, as well as of the causes and effects of modern events. How absurd it seems, then, to deem oneself a good Jew without possessing a knowledge of the vast chronology of Judaism and its glorious institutions!

The responsibility of training the child, of molding his personality and providing him with a suitable environment in which to flourish, belongs first of all to the parents and should be assured by them if they are to meet their obligations adequately and successfully. Parents must realize that the most effective way of instruction is by means of example, rather than by precept, that actions speak more truly than words and that living illustrations appeal more strongly than fine eloquence. It is a scientifically proved fact that the eye perceives sooner and becomes more quickly impressed than the ear.

"Thus," says the Hafetz Hayim, "The Torah, in admonishing us (in the first paragraph of the Sh'ma) to teach her principles diligently, commands first to practice what we teach, that we impress the words of the Torah on our hearts so that our examples will be an incentive to effective action.

"Great is the love of every father for his children. His devotion is fastened by all the fibres of heart and soul. Almost all his efforts are concentrated on their happiness and well-being. He feeds primarily on the promise and hope of their contentment. Though there are people who, because of need, sell their own blood for medical purposes, no

sane father ever sells the blood of his children. Every drop of their blood is so dear and precious to him that no sum could ever buy one from him. Yet what a paradox; fathers deprive their children of their very life-blood, of the basic means of spiritual happiness which only a good and sound Jewish education can secure!"

"Sanctity cannot enter until impurity is driven out. Jacob, Scripture says, ordered his children first to put away their strange gods, change their garments, and then he bade them, 'arise ye and go up to Beth El.'²

"Unfortunately many schools spring up in our days where the Torah is being supplanted by heresy and unbelief, where the Bible is substituted by texts which treat its sacred contents as mere folktales, and where the teachers themselves desecrate everything hallowed in Israel. Children of such un-Jewish schools grow up without loyalty to their traditions; they learn to care very little for Judaism, even as though they did not come of Jewish stock."

In commenting upon the passage: "Along with Jacob each one came (to Egypt) with his family,"³ he remarked:

"In Egypt, a land of paganism and licentiousness, Jacob's children would not trust themselves with the spiritual guardianship of their children. Only when their father, who had emerged trium-

2. Gen. 35:2-3.

3. Ex. 1:1.

phantly, unshaken in his faith, from his contacts with dishonest Laban and crabbed Esau, agreed to accompany them, did they feel inclined to bring their children along. They fully realized the great blessing of flaming and courageous youth associated with the wisdom and experience, the dignity and intelligence of age.

"The duty of training the young, of imbuing them with the zeal and fervor of the sages, prophets and philosophers in Israel is incumbent upon every Jewish community. Our leaders and men of learning are obliged to see that schools be maintained where children can receive a truly Jewish education. 'Be wary of the children of the poor, for out of them will the Torah go forth, is the admonition of the sages.'"⁴

It is said, "Neither bread to the wise, nor riches to the man of understanding."⁵ This passage, the Hafetz Hayim used to interpret as follows:

"It should be the concern of the wealthy to understand the needs of the wise. Unhappy is the people whose wealthy folk think only of themselves and fail to maintain the scholar and his wisdom. Thus, the lack of bread to the wise proves the lack of wisdom in the rich.

"If most of a man's children have forsaken the Torah and violated her commandments, let him try his utmost to save at least one child. However, if this be impossible, let him maintain poor scholars, and

4. *Nedarim* 81a.

5. *Ecc.* IX:11.

teach someone else's children Torah, which is as though one gave birth to them oneself.

"It is for the sake of our children that we live and exist, as illustrated in the Midrash: A king had a garden which he laid out with rows of fig trees, rows of vines and rows of pomegranates. He entrusted the garden into the hands of a keeper, whom he asked to take good care of its trees and flowers. In after days, the king came to see what the gardener had accomplished. He was shocked to find the garden utterly neglected, full of thorns and thistles. In his wrath, he summoned woodcutters and ordered them to cut down the trees. But before they began their destruction, the king suddenly perceived a lily. He plucked it, and its fragrance restored his spirit. He then turned and said: 'For the sake of the lily, the garden shall be saved.'

"Likewise, the sages say: 'The order of the Universe exists by virtue of the pure breath of school children.'⁶ Hence, amidst the confusion of present day life, amidst the thorns and thistles which our negligence has caused to grow in the vineyard of Israel, the hope and promise of our age are the little lilies—our school children. Our most sublime ideals and aspirations, our dreams and yearnings are invested in the youth of Israel."

6. Sabbath 119b.

CHAPTER VIII
THE SABBATH

Treasure of heart for the broken people,
Gift of new soul for the souls distrest,
Soother of sighs for the prisoned spirit—
The Sabbath of rest.

*This day is for Israel light and rejoicing,
A Sabbath of rest.*

When the work of the worlds in their
wonder was finished,

Thou madest this day to be holy and blest,
And those heavy-laden find safety and
stillness,

A Sabbath of rest.

*This day is for Israel light and rejoicing,
A Sabbath of rest.*

—ISAAC LURIA, 1560

This impressive song sums up the quintessence of the significance of the Sabbath, and points out the heights of idealism toward which the observer soars thereon, approaching nearest the realm of his Maker.

Says the Talmud: "The Holy One said to Moses: 'I have a goodly gift called Sabbath in my treasury

and I wish to bestow it upon Israel. Go and announce my intentions to them.' ”¹

To this Rabbi Israel Meir was wont to add: “There are costly jewels and precious stones that even the greatest nobleman cannot afford to purchase. Some of them only kings may acquire, while others remain even beyond their reach. It follows that only a great Emperor may possess the most splendid jewels.

“Certainly the treasury of the King of Kings must surpass all others. Yet, of all his abundant splendor, he chose the Sabbath as His most cherished treasure and deemed it worthy to be called a ‘goodly gift.’

“Realizing how highly esteemed this gift must be, should we not endeavor to merit it by proper observance of the Sabbath Day? . . .

“The first divine blessing bestowed upon Creation, as well as the first to be mentioned in the Torah, was: ‘And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it.’² Great is therefore the merit of him who observes the Sabbath. His reward is inestimable. The Sabbath is called *kallah*, the bride, to whom Israel is betrothed; the wealthy Father in Heaven will surely shower munificent gifts upon the groom—Israel.

“The commandment to observe the Sabbath is twelve times repeated in the Torah! None of the commandments imposes such a responsibility upon the master of the house as does the Sabbath. It is his

1. Sabbath 11b.

2. Gen. II, 3.

duty to see that his son, daughter, servant, bondman, cattle, and all other dependents rest on this day.”³

In his books, the Hafetz Hayim emphasizes again and again the basic importance of this sacred day; that it is the perennial fountain of idealism and spiritual regeneration, an impetus to a life of inspiration, holiness, virtue, chastity, charity, love and peace. To borrow from the great poet and philosopher, Rabbi Judah HaLevi, “The Sabbath day is the choicest flower and fruit of the week, the Queen whose coming changes the humblest home into a palace.”⁴ On that day the Jew has a presentiment of the pure bliss and happiness which are stored up for the righteous—a foretaste of Paradise. The banishment of all struggle and turmoil, the tranquillity and cheer which this day brings to the weary Jew, was believed to be due to an additional soul—*neshamah yeserah*, an increased capacity for lofty thoughts and holy yearnings.⁵

The Hafetz Hayim urges his coreligionists to restore the Sabbath to its former glory. “The Sabbath is the heart of Judaism. It is like to a dangerously ill patient being treated by various specialists. Each diagnostician declares that the patient must first attend to the cure of the particular illness concerning

3. Ex. XX. 9.

4. Cuzari III, 5; see also Talmud Sabbath 119a.

5. *Beṭza* 16a. The added soul, originally a figure of speech, came to represent for some minds a sober fact. In the *Zohar Vayakhe!* we read of some teachers who thought of it as actually coming down from Heaven every week, and bringing with it some of the Heavenly bliss. It is scented, they would say, with the perfume of Paradise and as it reaches earth, sorrow and sighing flee away and peace and joy reign supreme.

which he is deemed an expert. Thereupon an old physician arises and addresses his colleagues: 'Gentlemen, you must take notice of the fact that the patient is suffering from a very severe heart ailment. Before you do anything, you ought to strengthen his heart, for so long as his heart is so ill, other cures will prove futile.' So," the Hafetz Hayim concludes, "all our efforts to cure our people of their spiritual illness will prove vain, so long as the observance of the Sabbath is neglected. The Sabbath must first be rehabilitated and absorb our utmost attention.

"God blessed the seventh day. Out of its bosom spring forth happiness and bliss for the whole week. How foolish, therefore, are those who think that by working or doing business thereon they will ever prosper. And if they seem to prosper, it will surely not remain with them, for they have transferred its blissfulness into a curse. ⁶

6. In his *Affirmations of Judaism*, the Rev. Dr. Joseph J. Hertz quotes from a German Protestant theologian of anti-Semitic tendencies: "Anyone who has had the opportunity of knowing in our own day the inner life of Jewish families that observe the Law of their fathers with sincere piety and in all strictness, will have been astonished at the wealth of joyfulness, gratitude, and sunshine, undreamt of by the outsider, which the Law animates in the Jewish home. The whole household rejoices on the Sabbath, which they celebrate with rare satisfaction not only as the day of rest, but rather as the day of rejoicing. Jewish prayers term the Sabbath a 'joy of the soul' to him who follows it. He enjoys the abundance of Thy goodness. Such expressions are not mere words; they are the outcome of pure and genuine happiness and enthusiasm."—R. Kittel; *The Religion of the People of Israel*.

Dr. Hertz concludes: "Amid all the misery and slavery that for so many centuries were the lot of Israel, once a week the home of the humblest Jew was flooded with light. On that day the despised and rejected of men was emancipated from the oppression and tribulation and degradation of this world; he felt himself a prince, a member of a great eternal people. The Sabbath was the home festival, the strength and glory of the home."

"The Sabbath is one of the two only institutions for the violation of which the Almighty sat in judgment, consigning to death the offender in the wilderness, who transgressed by gathering sticks on the Sabbath day.⁷ The other was that of the blasphemer.⁸

"The Sabbath in the Jewish sense signifies an abdication on that day of the right to be master of certain things enjoyed by man during the six other days. It means not only resting oneself, but letting all other things rest; creating nothing—neither fire nor sound, excepting when it be for the sake of the Creator Himself. A Sabbath so observed, by resting completely oneself and letting all other things and beings rest, by ceasing to be a master of anything, thereby giving over all mastery to the one real Master, is an essential affirmation of one's faith; of one's belief in the Torah and in the One God.

"To violate the Sabbath by working on it is therefore more than merely breaking an ordinance. It amounts to denying the truth of Creation; it is an attempt to be master of something on the day which the Eternal has chosen as belonging exclusively to Himself. The attitude of the Jew on the Sabbath must be: Today I am not a master of anything; I may not command my slave to work for me, nor my animal; I may not strike a match, for that would be creating a fire, and only a Master may create; I may

7. Numbers XV, 32-6.

8. Leviticus XXIV, 10-18.

not purchase, I may not ride, I may not sell, for all these things make me master of objects of labor.⁹

"The Sabbath is an affirmation of God and Judaism. By turning his thoughts back to the beginning of things, the Jew is impressively reminded of the great truth that the universe is the handiwork of God. It is even more. 'It is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that ye may know that I am the Lord Who sanctified you.'¹⁰

"The Jew who observes the Sabbath may be compared to an artisan, who hangs out a sign indicating his occupation, so that all may come to him for his wares. As long as the sign remains on his house, all can see that the artisan still dwells and works there. He may leave his home from time to time, but the sign remains to show that he still maintains his permanent residence there. However, as soon as he takes down the sign, the passerby assumes that he has moved and is no longer to be found at his old address.

"Such is the case with the Sabbath. It is a sign that the Almighty created heaven and earth in six

9. The writer was once called upon to settle a dispute between a young couple. The woman, coming from a religious home, was a Sabbath observer, while the young man, a salesman, was careless about Jewish traditions, the Sabbath in particular. The woman complained that he did not pay enough attention to her. He did not take her out and had no time for her at all. The husband reiterated that the whole week he was kept busy with the firm and that his time did not belong to himself but to his concern. The only time he could find to take his wife out was either on a Friday evening or Sabbath afternoon. To this, the wife answered that Friday evenings and Sabbath afternoons did not belong to her. They belonged to God, who said, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy," and He therefore had the first mortgage on that time, and to Him we owe the first interest thereof.

10. Exodus 31, 13.

days and rested on the seventh. The Jew who holds aloft this glorious standard demonstrates explicitly that he believes in the Creator and Master of all, and acknowledges that it is our duty to be obedient to Him, with all our heart and soul, since He is Lord over all our possessions. It serves as a symbol of the Almighty's presence in the Jew's life and heart, inspiring and filling his soul with serenity and holiness.

"Remove the Sabbath and the Eternal is no longer in evidence there.

"No deeds of charity, nor any amount of philanthropy and good-heartedness, can ever atone for the desecration of the Sabbath."

Once, on a visit to Moscow in the interest of his yeshivah, the noted Jewish banker, Abraham Rosenzweig, came to see him. The guest held out a note for five hundred rubles, offering it as a donation. The Hafetz Hayim refused to accept it. Mr. Rosenzweig thought that the rabbi would not take such a small sum from him as a gift. He therefore doubled the amount. Yet the Hafetz Hayim again paid no attention to the money and remained silent. Mr. Rosenzweig, in a sorrowful voice, asked, "Don't you think, rabbi, that a thousand rubles is a fine donation from me?"

Tears burst from the rabbi's eyes and with a deep sigh he stammered: "No, no, not because of that. It's a fine donation; even 500 rubles is fair enough. However, it pains me to face you in such a state—

I, representing the scholars, the so-called Issachars of today (son of Jacob dedicated to the study of the Torah) and you the modern Zebulun (another son of Jacob who provided materially for Issachar, thus sharing the latter's spiritual boon)."

He caught hold of the banker's hand and continued: "Woe, woe! Such a brilliant hand, that gives so liberally and abundantly, will burn in the fires of *Gehenna* for doing work on the Sabbath!"

Mr. Rosenzweig was so deeply stirred by the exhortation of the saint that he broke down and wept. Only after he assured the rabbi that henceforth he would "Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy" did the Hafetz Hayim accept his donation.

To explain the reason for celebrating the Sabbath with abundant repasts, instead of devoting the entire day to the needs of the spirit alone, he used to quote an illustration from the *Dubner Maggid*. Once there was a nobleman who was passionately fond of music. In his old age he became blind. Anxious to enjoy a good orchestra, he asked his servant to lead him thither. He was so captivated by the sweetness of the music that he felt a strong desire to dance. He therefore took the servant as his dancing partner. But the latter, dumb and ignorant, remained indifferent to the music. The master, therefore, regaled him with a delicious meal, and gave him old wine to drink. The servant became gay and jolly and was ready to dance together with the master—who remained fascinated by the music, while the

simpleton's dancing was prompted by the wine he had drunk.

Man likewise is composed of two different elements, the body and the soul. The soul is celestial in its substance, while the body is earthly. On the sacred Sabbath day, when the heavenly chorus is at its height, the spellbound soul yearns to dance. Accordingly, it has no alternative but to make a partner of its servant, the body. The latter is therefore ordered to "eat fats and drink sweets" and "to call the Sabbath a delight. The claims of both, body and soul, are thus given full satisfaction."

Israel's glory of the past and the realization of his visions in the future, all that has been deemed solemn and precious throughout the ages depend primarily upon the rededication of the Sabbath. In this age of mechanism and industry, when the individual is but a cog in the vast machinery, it behooves us even more to appreciate the blessing of the Sabbath, the safeguard of the Jewish spirit, the heart and soul of the sacred traditions of Judaism.

CHAPTER IX

THE HEAD OF THE YEAR

Rosh Hashanah in its literal rendering means "The Head of the Year," *Rosh* in Hebrew meaning head, and *Hashanah* the year. "The head," our sages say, "is king of all the members of the body." Scientifically the head is recognized as the mainspring of life. It controls and regulates all functions indispensable to life. It is the seat of the brain, the center of thought, feeling, and consciousness. Similarly, Rosh Hashanah, the Head Day of the Year, constitutes a source of holiness; it is the center of spiritual power and moral strength. Like the human head it contains the brain, the thought and consciousness of the coming year. It is the crown of the three hundred and sixty-five days which comprise the organs of the body—the year.

This day in all its earnestness ought to be devoted to solemn meditation and unselfish soul uplifting. Rather than pray for petty and egotistic advantages, one's prayers should be concentrated upon universal ideals. With utmost devotion and wholeheartedness our supplication ought to be primarily that the Almighty impress His name upon all His works; that all form one bond to perform His will with an up-

right heart; that he grant honor to his people, let iniquity perish, and He alone reign over all His creatures in the Mount Zion of His glory and in Jerusalem, the city of His sanctity."

This the Hafetz Hayim illustrated as follows:

It is related that the dethroned Czar Nicholas II asked his captors to increase his daily ration of bread and that more comfortable service be granted him. Such a request earned him the scorn and laughter of his former subjects. Instead of protesting his degradation and bravely demanding the restoration of his former prerogatives and glory, he fell so low as to ask merely for little things to satisfy his stomach. "Stupid Nicholas!" all remarked.

"Our anxiety," he concluded, "should therefore be concerned with a speedy rehabilitation of the divine throne in Zion, for the universal recognition of His omnipotence, and for the restoration of Israel's glory. Such petty things as bread and other physical comforts will eventually be obtained."

CHAPTER X

PIONEERS OF LIBERTY

Although the exodus of the Israelites from the Egyptian "house of bondage" is an event commemorated by their posterity alone, its significance is universal. The Hebrews liberated by Moses became the pioneers of freedom, the champions of human rights.

A slave in ancient society was treated as a beast, frequently even worse. Torture and cruelty were his daily portion. He was deprived of the very privilege to live, if his master wished him to die. The sick and old were exposed to cold and starvation, or directly put to death.

"Learning to the crooked is as dangerous as a gun in the hands of a thug," says the Hafetz Hayim. Though the Egyptians of that epoch excelled other people in certain matters of civilization and culture, they found justification to enslave and impose affliction upon an entire people. Like our modern anti-Semites, self-defense or self-preservation was Pharaoh's apology for his intrigues against his Hebrew subjects. He appealed to the national sentiment of the super-patriots, with the argument: "Behold the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we. Come, let us deal wisely with them, lest

they multiply and it come to pass that when there falleth out any war they join also our enemies and fight against us." ¹ In their wild lust for blood even innocent babies were not spared. The infants were snatched from their mothers' breasts and killed or buried alive in the waves of the Nile.

It is amazing to what a surge of moral degradation man can sink in violence toward his own kind. He will sympathize with a wretched animal but remain hardened toward an unfortunate fellow being. Or to borrow from Scripture: "The men they slaughter and the calves they kiss." ²

Moreover, man in his greed and hatred sometimes strikes the worst blow at his nearest of kin. In warning us against harboring ill will toward others, the Torah commands: "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart" and in the same breath orders: "Love thy neighbor as thyself." ³ Note the difference between the two commands. Man's animosity toward a neighbor may sooner be extinguished and replaced by love than aversion toward his kin. Hence the maximum demand of the Torah is never to cherish a feeling of hostility toward a brother.

The ancient fable cited by our sages well illustrates this point. When God created iron, the trees began to weep. When God asked the reason for their tears, they said: "We cry because Thou hast

1. Exodus I, 9-10.

2. Hosea XIII, 2.

3. Lev. XI, 17-18.

created the iron to destroy us therewith. All this while we had thought ourselves the highest of the earth and now Thou hast called the iron into existence to uproot us!" God replied: "If you yourselves will not furnish the axe with a handle, the iron will not be able to do harm to you." It follows that the blow from a hostile kinsman is less endurable than that from a stranger.

Thus, the Hafetz Hayim explained why, in fulfilling His preordained exile of the Children of Abraham to "a land that is not theirs where they will serve and be afflicted four hundred years," the Almighty caused them to be banished to Egypt instead of permitting Jacob and his children to remain in exile with Laban. The Israelites would not have survived the barbarity of their own kinsfolk. To quote the *Haggadah*: "Search and inquire what Laban the Syrian intended to do to our father Jacob, for Pharaoh decreed destruction of the males only, but Laban intended to annihilate the whole, as it says: 'A Syrian had nearly caused my father to perish and he went down into Egypt and sojourned there with a few souls and there became a great, mighty and populous nation.'"

Similarly Jacob before encountering Esau prayed, "Deliver me, I pray Thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I fear him lest he will come and smite me, the mother, and the children."

Moses however could not imagine that Pharaoh's

brutality might be surpassed. When departing from his father-in-law Jethro, he said: "I shall go and see my brethren in Egypt whether they still be alive." He seems to have wondered how under such unbearable tortures they still could exist.

For hundreds of years none even challenged Pharaoh's atrocious decrees against the people of Israel. The subdued Hebrews dared not protest against the cruelty. The repressing yoke crushed their spirit and dimmed their hope for better days.

It was, therefore, the double task of Moses to challenge the tyranny of Pharaoh, rebuke his despotism and savagery and demand the exercise of justice toward the people of Israel, and also to convince his brethren of their inalienable right to enjoy a life of freedom and equality.

Israel's exodus from Egypt revolutionized the conception of justice; it heralded a new era to humanity, gave impetus to a new social and political order of society, and brought a new message of hope and promise to all mankind.

Unlike the Greek philosophers who so late as a thousand years after the exodus deemed slavery an essential institution in the utopias of their imagination, the Jewish prophets and sages have continuously raised their eloquent voices in condemnation of slavery. With an unsurpassed passion and fervor, they envisioned a state of perfect justice where slavery would be impossible.

The Hebrew ideal of justice has since penetrated

the uttermost parts of the globe. In the history of Western civilization it inspired almost all the movements against despotism and tyranny. The Jewish spirit is vividly manifested in the emancipation of slaves, in the abolition of serfdom and feudalism, in the popular revolts against corrupt authority, in the various *Magna Chartas* for the defense of the poor and the weak.

In America, though we do not find Jews among the leaders in the struggle against the British, nor Jewish signatures in the Declaration of Independence, or the Constitution, yet, says Locke, "Hebraic mortar cemented American institutions." It is the cornerstone of American democracy, the life-blood of the Declaration as well as of the Constitution. The fathers of this Republic were primarily inspired by the tenets of the immortal leader, Moses.

The Liberty Bell, whose pealing proclaimed the independence of the United States of America, contains the Biblical inscription, "Proclaim liberty throughout the land, unto all the inhabitants thereof," taken from the books of Moses.⁵

Moreover, the committee that wrote the Declaration of Independence submitted a design for the seal of the new Republic, that remained the official seal until the beginning of the last century. Around the border runs the dictum "Resistance to tyrants is obedience to God." And the face depicts Moses,

5. Lev. XXV. 10.

leading the emancipation of the Children of Israel out of bondage.

Thus, the most lofty ideals of civil justice and individual liberty as proclaimed by the first freed men, under the Godly leadership of Moses, have penetrated through Judaism into the world at large. They have particularly rooted themselves profoundly into the heart and soul of every Jew. For more than 3300 years the Jew has been the preacher of social freedom and the opponent of tyranny. He has been humanity's ever-living "statue of liberty."

CHAPTER XI

ON KNOWLEDGE OF THE TORAH

The more precious a jewel, the fewer its connoisseurs. Hence the Torah, whose value is higher than the rarest of costly stones, has but few to comprehend her excellence and appreciate her worth. The Hafetz Hayim thus illustrated this idea:

A great and wealthy king ordered a new crown to be made for him by an expert jeweler. Studded with incomparable dazzling stones, it captivated the eye with its beauty. The king assigned one of his knights to deliver the crown. On his way the knight was greeted by crowds eager to catch a glimpse of it. But his attention was attracted to a peasant, who had just ceased plowing his field with a pair of beautiful oxen. The knight offered to buy the oxen from him at a price far above their value. This the peasant blankly refused. The messenger therefore pretended that he would give him the crown in exchange. But this too the ignorant peasant declined, remonstrating that for no money in the world would he part with his oxen.

"Alas, we find a great many such ignoramuses in our midst, who, like that foolish peasant, hesitate

to exchange their poor and temporary belongings for the most precious of crowns—the Torah," the Hafetz Hayim concluded.

"Our prayer reads, 'Sanctify us, oh God, with Thy commandments, and give us a share in Thy Torah.'

"The scroll of the Law is considered the most sacred possession of the Jew. The parchment, however, is not the primary source of its sanctity, but the inscription absorbed therein. The very process of preparing the parchment for the writing of the Torah bestows upon it a certain degree of holiness. How much more sanctified does a man become, when his life-blood absorbs the living words of the Torah and his heart is left with an indelible imprint. More, the mere fact that one devotes himself to study the Torah elevates him above the material world. No wonder, therefore, that the knowledge of the Torah excels all other virtues in the opinion of the sages.

"The knowledge of the Torah is the noblest yearning of human aspiration and its possession the greatest of man's treasures. There is no joy loftier, no contentment deeper than an understanding of its principles—which are believed to contain solutions to all the phenomena of life. An old talmudical dictum says: 'If thou hast acquired knowledge, what wantest thou? If thou art in want of knowledge, what hast thou acquired?'¹ The attainment of knowl-

1. *Midrash Lev. 1.*

edge of the Torah is thus considered the ultimate goal of every thoughtful Jew."

The story is told of a sage who prayed that his paradise in the world to come be filled with books, with an opportunity to continue his studies undisturbed. Another sage expressed his astonishment that any reward was promised for studying the Torah, for he could not imagine a greater pleasure than that offered by the study thereof.

Nevertheless, man ought to realize that he is more or less limited in his intellectual capacity, being unable to penetrate the secret gateways of wisdom. He may sometimes be successful in reaching a high altitude in his efforts to climb the mountain of knowledge, yet sooner or later he must succumb to the inevitable, realizing his powerlessness to ascend the topmost point of his ideal. Moses, the greatest of mortals, had been permitted to penetrate but forty-nine degrees of wisdom and was unable to reach the fiftieth—so state the rabbis.

As a matter of fact, the less one knows, the more he usually thinks he knows. The more knowledge one acquires, the more he realizes how little he possesses. Maimonides often quoted the famous saying: "The object of knowledge is to know that you do not know."² Indeed it is only the ignoramus who thinks he knows a great deal, but the more the intel-

2. Socrates is credited with saying, when he heard that the Oracle at Delphi had proclaimed him the wisest man in the world: "Perhaps I am the

ligent man learns the greater becomes his thirst for knowledge.

Only fools will say, "If learning to know that we don't know be an ideal, then why learn at all? Why not take it for granted from the outset that we do not know, and let that be all?" This can be explained by the following illustration:

Two people once traveled a long distance, to see the face of the king. When they reached the royal palace, they learned with regret that for some reason no stranger was permitted to enter the royal chamber. Great was their disappointment. One retired immediately, not even attempting to enter the interior portals of the magnificent edifice. But the other entered the anteroom and was amazed at the beautiful sculptures and paintings he encountered. The rooms which he entered thereafter astounded him even more. The magnificent furniture, the exquisite paintings, the costly rugs, the precious antiques, and the general luxury brought him extraordinary joy and pleasure. He felt as though those few moments of his happiness had made his whole life beautiful and worth while; but when he reached the doors of the innermost chamber, where the king was seated on the throne of his glory, he had to retreat, for he was not permitted to advance any further.

wisest man in the world, because I am the only man who thoroughly realizes how little I know."

Thomas Edison on one occasion is reported to have remarked: "If a man were to devote his entire life to the study of one particular subject, he might be able to obtain one percent of the knowledge to be had on that subject."

Such, explained the Hafetz Hayim, will be the reward of him who constantly pursues his study of the Torah, and continues in his search for wisdom and in his yearning to attain the heights of saintliness. He will see new worlds revealed to him, though very frequently he may fail to achieve the pinnacle of his ambition. He has, however, the satisfaction of enjoying the view of every other chamber of divine knowledge, whereas the ignorant man deprives himself of such privileges. He will never experience true happiness, for he has excluded himself from the pleasure of envisaging the innermost portals of wisdom.

What, indeed, is life worth without knowledge? It is void and meaningless, robbed of its idealism and inspiration. The so-called bliss of ignorance is nothing but an illusion.

The story is told of Alexander the Great, that after he had completed his last conquest in the Far East, he wept bitterly. There were no more worlds for him to conquer. But in the field of knowledge there is no limit to the heroic conquest of the intellect. This explains why the Jewish scholar, no matter how profound his achievements, is called but a *talmid habam*—a disciple of the wise—for learning continuously and meditating day and night in the Torah is his chief aspiration.

“Were man to live coeval with the sun,
The patriarch-pupil would be learning still.”³

3. E. Young—*Night Thoughts*. Night VII, 86.

CHAPTER XII OF OPTIMISM

"The people that walk in darkness have seen a great light. They that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them has the light shined."¹

Says the Hafetz Hayim: "A person must never despair even in the darkest hour. Before dawn, darkness is most dense; before the seed sown in the ground begins to sprout, it must first be decomposed. Even at the very beginning of Creation, the Eternal demonstrated this rule. Before light was created, all was darkness over the face of the deep, and only when God said, 'Let there be light,' was there light."

Optimism has thus become a predominating characteristic of the Jewish people; it forms the gist of the specifically Jewish *Weltanschauung*. Even the most dreary trials of the *galuth* have failed to shatter the fortitude of the Jew and cast him into the abyss of despair.²

When Jeremiah envisaged the desolation of Mother Zion, that Nebuchadnezzar would raze Jerusalem, kill her children, and carry her remnants

1. Isaiah IX, 1.

2. "Optimism," declares Schopenhauer, "is as irreconcilable with Christianity as it is with Buddhism and Brahminism. Also the fundamental

away into captivity, he did not lose himself in wailing and despair, but sought to encourage his brethren, to instill into them solace and strength. He visualized better times, assuring them, "Yet again shall there be heard in this place of which you say, 'It is ruined without man and without beast,' even in the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate without men and without inhabitants and without beasts, the voice of gladness and the voice of joy, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voice of those who say 'Give thanks unto the Lord of Hosts because the Lord is good and His kindness is infinite.'"³ He admonished his contemporaries to buy land and preserve the deeds thereon for the forthcoming redemption of Israel. . . "I will yet build thee up and thou shalt be rebuilt, oh Virgin of Judah."

On the Ninth Day of Ab (*Tisha B'ab*) the Israelites throughout the world bewail the desolation

characteristics of Judaism are optimism and realism." ("On Christianity"—ed. A. L. Burt & Co., p. 272).

The optimistic tendencies in the teaching of Judaism are obvious. "All that He created was very good" (Gen. 1, 31). "Man should always train himself to say, 'Whatever the Merciful One does is for our benefit'" (Yalk, Job 693; Tal. Berachoth 60b.). Even Ecclesiastes, though apparently pessimistic, states: "He hath made everything good, in its time." Also, "But that every man should eat and drink and enjoy pleasure is the gift of God."

Hence, while Judaism deems life and creation basically good and takes a bright and hopeful view of nature, other religions with Christianity, take a gloomy aspect of creation, considering the world in general, and human life in particular, as essentially evil. To quote from Lord Byron:

"Deep in yon cave Honarius long did dwell.

In the hope to merit heaven by making earth a hell."

(*Childe Harold*, Canto 1st, 20).

3. 33, 10, 11.

of Jerusalem and lament the destruction of the Temple and the captivity of our people. What bitter recollections this anniversary arouses in our prayers! We review a ceaseless chain of martyrdom, one misfortune after another, the scaffold and the stake. Yet amidst the gloom, streaks of sunshine can be discerned. There is comfort in sorrow and hope in despair. The Jew feels that, like the stars in heaven, he too is part of the Eternal scheme of life. When the King of the Khazars sought an adequate religion the Jewish philosopher first spoke of the fact that God is manifest in the history of Israel.

The Talmud relates that once when Rabbis Akiba, Eliezer, and Joshua heard the roaring of wild beasts on the ruins of Mt. Moriah, despite the wailings of his colleagues, Rabbi Akiba smiled, for he was reflecting upon the forthcoming realization of the glorious future envisioned by the prophets.⁴

Thus, even *Tisha B'ab* holds out its promise to Jewish mourners, for tradition has it that on *Tisha B'ab* the Messiah is to be born. More, the Jew feels that though Titus burned the Temple and reduced Jerusalem to ashes, this was merely the physical Jerusalem, the Jerusalem of wood and stone; but the Jerusalem of the spirit is indestructible. It is the spiritual Jerusalem too that our sages and scholars in all ages sought to beautify and extol.

4. *Makkoth* 24a.

The Jewish people have found life while walking in the shadow of death. Their optimism has enabled them to discover good in a chaos of evil, joy in an ocean of misery, and beams of sunshine in the abyss of darkness.

CHAPTER XIII

ON BECOMING A GOOD JEW

Ephraim Kaplan, famed Yiddish writer, once asked the Hafetz Hayim what one must observe in order to be a good Jew.

"Observe the *Shulchan Aruch* (Code of Laws)—that means, all the *mitzvot* expounded therein," was the sage's rejoinder.

"If so, then you exclude ninety percent of the people from that privilege," averred the journalist.

"True; but if you buy a bottle of pure alcohol and reduce its strength and adulterate it, the shop-keeper who sold it is not to be blamed for the changed strength. Likewise, you asked me to define pure, unadulterated Jewishness—which I did!"

According to the Hafetz Hayim, the Torah in its entirety is like a living organism; the six hundred and thirteen precepts comprise the vital members. Hence just as one cannot handle a single isolated organ of a living entity as though it possessed a life independent of the rest, so must he not judge every single *mitzvah* independently of the rest. Every law, beside having its own interpretation, helps to explain the others—one being complementary of the all, and the all of one.

In his instructions the Hafetz Hayim used to emphasize that the performance of good deeds (*maasim tovim*) is the ultimate goal of Jewish ethics. *Kavanah* (devotion), however important an element it may be in the realization of a *mitzvah*, is stripped of its merit when not associated with practice. Should one spend the whole day in solemn meditation and concentrate all his devotion about a certain virtue, without actually performing it, he would reap no reward at all. As a matter of fact, the Torah consists primarily of "Thou shalt do," or "Thou shalt not do." To be a Jew at heart deserves no more credit than does being a millionaire at heart. No amount of stored information can make up for the lack of Jewishness.

Furthermore, "Practice is the key to knowledge." It leads to an understanding and appreciation of Judaism: "Experience (or taste) and see that the Lord is good."

To borrow an illustration from a famous author: "One who has never seen the sunlight out of doors, who has been shut up all his life in a room dimly lighted by a feeble light, and who has been instructed by professors in the laws of reflection, according to which light is thrown back from the myriad objects of nature; or refraction, by which the strong shafts of light is broken into the beauty of prismatic colors—could such a person have any adequate conception of light? He might talk wisely about it, more so than others, perhaps with the help of his diagrams

and formulas. However, without ever having seen the light, without ever having rejoiced in it, he would hardly know what light is.

"It is equally true of a person who has never tasted water. He might obtain from a chemist a certain intellectual understanding of it, might learn what elements enter into it and in what proportion, but he would not know what water really is, as might the traveler who, after a long journey in a dreary wilderness, finds a cool spring to revive his parched lips and satisfy his thirst.

"You cannot know what light is unless you see it, or what water is unless you taste it; you must have experience of them in order to know them. So, too, you must have experience of religion in order to know it."

CHAPTER XIV

TRENDS AND TIDES IN JUDAISM

A *bassid* once said to Reb Leib (the oldest son of the Hafetz Hayim): "You know that our *zaddikim* (hassidic rabbis) are credited with the power to work miracles, as it says, 'The *zaddik* orders and the Holy One, blessed be He, fulfills.'¹ Does your father, as a great *zaddik*, perform miracles too?"

Reb Leib replied, "You deem it a miracle when God does the will of your *zaddik*, but we deem it a miracle if it can truthfully be asserted that the *zaddik* fulfills the will of God."

Indeed the Hafetz Hayim never pretended to work miracles, or that he was endowed with supernatural powers. To people, who entreated him that he give them his blessing and offer prayers for them, he answered: "Why beseech a mortal who is unwilling and unable to help? Why not implore the Almighty who is ever ready and able to help you?"

To be sure, the Hafetz Hayim was not a *bassid** in the popular sense of the word—meaning a follower of the movement originated by Israel Baal Shem (1700-1760). He belonged to no sect or party.

1. *Sabbath* 63a.

* Literally *bassid* means saint.

To an inquisitive *hassid* he once described himself: "I am neither a *hassid* nor a *misnagid* (antagonist of hassidism); I am just an ordinary Jew."

On another occasion he remarked with a smile: "On the Day of Judgment in the world to come, the Talmud says that every Jew will be asked such questions as: whether he devoted his time to the study of the Torah, or was he honest and trustworthy in his dealings with people, etc.; but nowhere does it say that man will be asked whether he was a *hassid* or of which Rebbe he was a follower."

The moral behavior of the Hafetz Hayim was a model of steadiness and proportion. His inner faculties functioned regularly and as near perfection as humanly possible. The study of the Talmud he considered most essential and the observance of its *halachoth* the *raison d'être* of Judaism. Hassidism, elevating the mystic elements at the expense of talmudic and *halachic* studies, with its ecstasies of joy and its over-exaltation of sentiment held no attraction for the Hafetz Hayim.

He belonged to the school inaugurated in the eighteenth century by Rabbi Elijah, Gaon of Wilna (1720-1797). Rabbi Elijah's personality was most profoundly revered and admired by the Hafetz Hayim. He said, "Intellects of such titanic calibre are very rare. Providence favors us with their presence perhaps once in about five hundred years."

Rabbi Elijah possessed an unusually thorough knowledge of Scripture, talmudic and mystic litera-

ture. He was well at home in the field of secular sciences. He led a life of uttermost saintliness and purity. Notwithstanding his austerity and asceticism, he never experienced a depressed state of mind. Though his trials and tribulations were many, he was always in a joyful mood. He was recognized as the spiritual head, not only of Lithuania, but of the entire Russian Jewry. More, even in other countries of the diaspora, he was acknowledged as the foremost authority on Judaism. Primarily, to Rabbi Elijah, the City of Wilna owes its universal renown as the seat of exemplary Jewish learning, grace and dignity. His spirit hovers over this famous community.

It was in such an environment that the Hafetz Hayim spent the formative years of his life in devoted study and meditation. The inspiring teachings of the Gaon were to him revelations of truth. The stories, dictums and sayings, current of him, captivated the imagination and enkindled the enthusiasm of young Israel Meir. The latter thereupon decided to make his conduct a vital reflection of their instructive morals.

In his decisions and interpretations of law, in his ethical treatises and discourses, the Hafetz Hayim cites very frequently Rabbi Elijah as the weightiest authority and expounder of traditional Judaism during the last few centuries.

Like the Gaon of Wilna, the Hafetz Hayim deplored those who have strayed. He often recalled the pitiful state in which he found the German Jews on his visit to Germany, about 1874. He felt heart-

broken that they had sold their spiritual birthright for an imaginary mess of pottage. In the frequent messages he issued to his orthodox brethren, the Hafetz Hayim held before them the fallacy of the *Haskalah* and Reform movements and the calamity they wrought in Jewish ranks. Though it may not have affected the personal conduct of some leading *Maskilim*, their influence proved detrimental to their followers. And he had no difficulty to prove that.

Mendelssohn (1729-1786), the celebrated father of *Haskalah* and Reform, is said to have lived in strict conformity with the *Shulchan Aruch*. He observed practically every Jewish formality and custom. Yet his orthodoxy failed too impress itself upon his immediate family and adherents. His own daughters renounced their faith and became instrumental in the conversion of more than half of the Jewish community in the City of Berlin.

Only instructions which emanate from a profound heart are capable of penetrating another's heart. Obviously, these *Maskilim*, in exercising their religious rites and customs, were neither prompted by a fervent yearning of soul nor animated by a fire of feeling and zealous devotion. They lacked enthusiasm and warmth of heart. Their cold reasoning, somehow, reconciled them to ritual observance or perhaps it merely led them to tolerate it, but they never achieved complete harmony between mind and heart.

As usual, the Hafetz Hayim based this argument too, upon a Biblical passage. "The corruption is not

his; it is the defect of his children, of the perverse and crooked generation."² In his interpretation thereof he declared:

"The slightest transgression committed by the parent reflects itself in considerable magnitude in the conduct of the children. This evil, if not curbed in time, will pervert the forthcoming generations."

The Hafetz Hayim in his militancy against the vile forces threatening Judaism, commanded the respect of all his opponents, for he was considered the living symbol of truth.

It is now admitted that the bitter fight the Gaon of Wilna led against Hassidism, forced the latter to revise its tendency and to turn its face toward a more intensive study of the Talmud and *Halachah*. The Hafetz Hayim, on the other hand, sought to solidify, strengthen and inspire the various groups in Judaism. In 1930 he was instrumental in reconciling two opposing hassidic dynasties in Poland, the Rabbis of Ger and Alexander. It was also then, under his stimulating leadership, that the guiding spirit in Galician Hassidism, the *Rebbe* of Belz, pledged to work in harmony for a united front of orthodoxy.

Thus, unlike Rabbi Elijah, the Hafetz Hayim was revered, and his saintliness acclaimed universally by all factions of Hassidism—a rare phenomenon indeed, in an age when jealousies and rivalries play havoc in the social life of scattered Israel.

2. Deut. XXXII, 5.

CHAPTER XV

PRIVILEGED HOMICIDE

Euthanasia, or a quick and easy death to an agonized invalid, is advocated now and then by so-called humanitarians. Why, they argue, should a helpless idiot, lunatic or a hopeless parietic, whose usefulness and chances of service seem to be over, be laboriously kept alive? Why subject the relatives to an aimless endurance of dreadfulness and weariness? Why be less merciful to human beings than to animals? Some philosophers of old saw evidence for a moral justification of mercy-killing in the fact that nature is provided with poisonous herbs and other deadly instrumentalities.

On the other hand, opponents maintain that doctors often are wrong in their diagnosing cases considered hopeless; that human judgment even at its best may prove misleading, and that a patient's desire for death is often a result of his impatience.

A physician relates: He once had under his care some incurable patients who suffered unbearable agonies. Strong narcotics could hardly put them to sleep for more than a few hours. In their misery they had cursed the day of their birth and prayed for a quick death. One evening the doctor placed a

box of tablets on their table and said: "Remember, one will put you to sleep, two will put you to death." The next morning he was amazed to find them still persisting in their pains. They did not sleep a wink all night. They were even afraid to touch the tablets. It goes to prove that as long as sanity does not forsake a patient, he clings stubbornly to life despite all woes and inflictions, for the desire to live is so powerful, even intense anguish cannot suppress it.

Judaism, of course, is outspokenly opposed to any form or method of euthanasia. Man is the crown of creation. To his intelligence was entrusted the conversion of the apparently destructive elements into agencies of constructiveness. Life is sacred in its origin, ideal in its scope and motive, a divine gift that man dare not abuse. "We are placed on earth as sentinels who must not desert their posts until they are relieved by their master." (*Phaedon*). King Saul is thus criticized by some sages for having urged his armor-bearer: "Draw thy sword and thrust me through, lest the uncircumcised come and thrust me through and make a mock of me."¹ In contrast thereto there is the story of R. Hanina ben Teradyon. When the saint was burning at the stake, his heart-broken disciples adjured him: "Open thy mouth that the flames may enter and the sooner put an end to thy sufferings." He serenely replied: "It is better that my soul be taken away by Him who hath given it; for no man may hasten his death."²

1. II Samuel XXXI, 4.

2. *Abodah Zarah* 18a; *Daath Zekenim M'baalei HaTosofoth*, Gen. IX, 5.

The Almighty in his unfathomable scheme of life willed that when the time comes the spirit return to its celestial abode on its own accord, unaccelerated by human device.

Though "the majority of those believed to be in a dying condition surely die"³ the laws concerning a dying person are: "One who is dying is to be considered as a living being in all respects. Even if he be a long time in a dying position and it causes great distress to himself and to his relatives, it is forbidden to quicken his end. Any one who touches him is like one who sheds blood. With what is this comparable? With a lamp's flickering flame which becomes extinguished as soon as a person touches it."⁴

It was the conviction of the talmudic sages that every man has his hour,⁵ that one may gain everlasting life in but a moment.⁶ The Hafetz Hayim used to say: "In one moment a wicked man may turn into a saint. That moment may be like a twinkle of an eye. One solemn thought, a single flash of true sincerity, a thrill of genuine repentance, one whole-hearted crave for spiritual elevation, may procure him eternal bliss. That chance lasts as long as the pulse of life beats."

During the Crusades, Christians in their zeal to disseminate their "Religion of Love," killed and massacred innocent Jews. Even babes were not spared.

3. *Shevuoth* 37b; *Yer. Yeb.* I, 3b.

4. *Semaboth* I; *Sabbath* 151b; *Maimonides Hil. Ovel*, IV, 1.

5. *Aboth* IV, 3.

6. *Abodah Zarah* 10 b; *Gitin* 28a.

In fear of the approaching villains, it is recorded that a certain rabbi gathered unto him little children and slew them, to prevent their falling into the hands of the Crusaders who would force Christianity upon them. He gave no heed to a protest by a colleague who denounced him as a murderer. It turned out that the latter was right. The Crusaders approaching the gates of that city, suddenly changed their course. The over-zealous rabbi could not help but blame himself. . . .

Later he was seized by other Crusaders, who slit his skin and put sand beneath, in order to increase his tortures of death. This was taken as a sign of divine disapproval of his too hasty act.⁷

Only when the sanctifying of God's Name is involved; only for the proclamation of His glory is the offering of life commendable. It is a paramount duty incumbent on every Jew to resist any kind of force or temptation to turn him away from his faith, even at the price of his most precious possession. To die for *Kiddush Hashem* is at once the greatest boon and attainment for the soul in its yearning for perfection.

Thus, the Hafetz Hayim had every day on his lips the prayer:

"May it be Thy will, O Merciful Father,
to bestow upon me the opportune distinction to sacrifice my humble life for
the sake of Thy glory . . . Amen."

7. *Daath Zekenim M'baalei HaTosofoth* Gen. IX, 5.

CHAPTER XVI

LOVE THY NEIGHBOR

It was his inherent humaneness and glowing love for his people that prompted the Hafetz Hayim in the creation of his admirable works. The attainment of man's salvation was his impetus to improve the morals and elevate the ethical standard of society.

"Love thy neighbor as thyself," is a fundamental principle of the Torah. When a heathen asked the famous Hillel to summarize the essence of Judaism while standing on one foot, that noble-hearted sage complied with his wishes, saying, "What is hateful unto thee, do not do unto others—this is the substance of the Torah; the rest is merely commentary."

The law does not require of man to love his neighbor more than himself, but merely "as thyself." Judaism refutes as impracticable and superfluous such commands as: "Love thine enemies," "Bless them that curse thee," "Pray for them that malign thee."¹ The maximum extent required by the Biblical command to love is explicitly stated: "Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of my

1. Luke VI. 27-28; Matt. V. 39-40; VII. 12.

In his book, *My Religion*, Tolstoy tells:

"Sometime ago, together with a rabbi, I was reading in Hebrew the fifth chapter of Matthew. At every verse, the rabbi said, 'This is in the Bible,'

people; and thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”² In order to assure one's freedom from dislike, and a proper attitude toward one's fellows, the Hafetz Hayim was wont to suggest the reading of such phrases as are found in Malachi and elsewhere: “For I have loved you, saith the Lord;” “I the Lord have loved him;” “Children are you of the Lord your God.” He declares in one of his works, “The perusal of such words brings to neighborly affection. It is obvious that if one looks down upon his fellows, seeing men only in their coarse earthly garment, he tends to despise them in his heart. But if one notes the declaration of the Holy One, blessed be He, that the human soul has a high and awesome origin in the heavenly realm—a declaration repeatedly made in Scripture—then his opinion of mankind itself is similarly exalted.”³

The tenets of Judaism demand nothing beyond the capability of men; it makes requirements only in proportion to their strength. Its dictum is *Torah lo bashamayim hi*—the Torah was not given to the

or ‘This is in the Talmud,’ and in both Bible and Talmud he showed me sentences very much like the declarations of the Sermon on the Mount. When we reached the words, ‘Resist not evil,’ the rabbi did not say, ‘This is in the Talmud,’ but with a smile he asked me, ‘Do the Christians obey this commandment? Do they turn the other cheek?’

“I had nothing to say in reply, especially since at that particular time, the Christians were far from turning the other cheek. I asked him if there were anything similar in the Bible, or in the Talmud. ‘No!’ he replied, ‘there is nothing like it; but tell me, do the Christians obey this regulation?’ I must admit that Christians not only were not turning the other cheek but have been smiting the Jews on both cheeks.”

2. Lev. XIX, 17-18.

3. *Shemirath Halashon*, I, 5.

heavenly, but to earthly beings alone. Man could hardly love others more than himself, and should never be expected willingly to sacrifice his property or his person to the evildoer, when assaulted. Scripture does not encourage such a sacrifice, but admonishes us that to exercise righteousness and justice is more acceptable to God than sacrifice. "Let thy friend's honor (let thy friend's property) be as dear to thee as thine own," is a maxim of Jewish ethics.⁴ It is an accepted principle that man cannot remain indifferent when his life or property is in danger, that man is moved when he sees his possessions at stake.⁵ Inasmuch as the rabbis realized that such is human nature, they interpreted Biblical laws in accordance with the principles of *Vehay bahem v'lo she'yamuth bahem*—"Let him live by the laws of the Torah and not die by them."⁶ They thus declared it a duty to use every means of defense when assailed.

To exceed the requirements of Hillel's Golden Rule is a privilege that merely a chosen few can afford to experience. Only those who are voluntarily self-sacrificing, dedicated to a life of superlative sanctity and purity of soul, can transcend to earthly bounds of man. A Midrashic legend tells how the angels Shemazai and Azazel, who descended from heaven to dwell on earth, could not help being over-powered by the tempting passions and desires of this world.⁷

4. *Aboth* II, 15-17.

5. *Pesabim* 11a.

6. *Sanhed.* 72a; *Pesabim* 11a.

7. *Zohar Hadash* Gen. X, 9.

Christianity with its adage, "Do unto others what ye would others do unto you" has totally disregarded the egotistic propensities which every earthly creature is by nature subject to. Man, because of his instinct of selfishness, could easily be persuaded that he deserves to be treated by others with excessive love and benignity, but he would hardly, if ever, let others expect it of him.

The injunction "to love your enemies" appears very lofty indeed, but true love, in order to flourish, must have justice for its foundation. Love, however divine its origin and quality, however spiritual its being and substance, must, like the spirit, have a body and its only appropriate body is justice, otherwise it can have no foothold on earth at all. Love must therefore be guarded against overstepping its set boundaries.

Furthermore, the exercise of love is but an expression of the inward feeling of heart and soul. How then can one acquire such a feeling by an injunction? You cannot by commandment be made to bless those who curse you, or to love those who hate you. But to do justice to your brother, though he be your enemy, that you can do. To act in righteousness toward your fellowman whether you love him or not is within your power, and by doing so you will gradually come to love him too.⁸

8. To quote Emanuel Kant: "Benevolence is a duty. He who frequently practices it and sees his benevolent intentions realized, at length comes to love him to whom he has done good. When, therefore, it is said, 'Thou

In his treatise on *The Love of Israel*, the Hafetz Hayim devoted all its five chapters to a discussion of the magnitude of the sin caused by a violation of the negative commandment: "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart." "This," the author says, "refers to inward hatred only, for he who strikes or reviles, or otherwise injures his neighbor by actual deeds, transgresses other commandments. When one is wronged by another, he must not bear him a grudge silently, but should gently say to him, 'Why did you act so?' and should then blot the matter from his mind.

"Suppose we were to see a man gorging himself with unclean food, we should certainly despise him for disregarding the divine warning, 'Defile not ye yourself in any of these things.' Yet he who bears hatred in his heart is as despicable, for just as the mouth was created to receive clean and proper food so the heart was made for pure and holy thoughts. He who stains it with thoughts of hatred, in spite of the warning 'Thou shalt not hate thy neighbor in thy heart,' defiles it in just the same manner as the other defiles his mouth, and his sin is just as great if not greater.

"The term 'thy brother' is meant to include all men, as we read, 'Say not, for I love this man and

shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,' it is not meant, thou shalt love him first, and do good to him in consequence of that love, but thou shalt do good to thy neighbor, and thus thy beneficence will engender in thee that love to mankind which is the fullness of the inclination to do good."—(*Metaphysical Elements of Ethics*, p. 313, 6th ed.)

hate that one, I love the learned and hate the ignorant, but love them all . . . ' " 8*

The Hafetz Hayim frequently underwent personal discomfiture to save others from suffering, particularly when the poor or helpless were involved. Once while a guest at the home of the rabbi of Baranovich, the Hafetz Hayim caused a great stir and excitement in the rabbi's household. The cook forgot to ask her mistress whether the soup was already salted and salted it again. When the meal was served the rabbi tasted his soup and angrily pushed his plate aside. The Hafetz Hayim, however, patiently finished his portion—to the surprise of his host. The Hafetz Hayim then turned to the rabbi.

"Will you please—as a personal favor—finish your soup too? I presume that the cook, in her excitement at having a guest, forgot and used an overdose of salt. If we do not eat the soup, the poor woman will feel disturbed, and even may be scolded by the *rebbetzin* (rabbi's wife). Do, therefore, finish your soup and comment upon it with praise."

The Hafetz Hayim further declares in his book *Shemirath Halashon*:

"The law commanding us to judge others on the scale of merit, and the precept concerning heeding one's tongue, are direct corollaries of the rule, 'And thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.' For if a man truly loves his neighbor, he will not speak evil against him and he will exert every effort to find extenuation

8*. *Aboth d'R. Nathan*, 15.

for his acts. Let him imagine *himself* guilty of an unworthy deed, and that men are gathered to denounce him. He surely would seek some valid defense for his action and would endeavor to exculpate himself on the ground of inadvertence, or accident, or other excuses. How strongly would he then desire to see some one arise to defend him before his accusers! Why then should he not apply the same reasons to defending others? . . .

"There are ways of aiding one's fellowmen even before the possible commission of an unworthy deed. . . . Whenever one sees a friend about to commit an unworthy act one should warn and guide him, and spare him the scorn of his associates . . .

"Let us take the case of a son who has acted improperly. The young man's comrade comes before the father and publicly proclaims the son's wrongdoing. The resentment of the father is justified when he declares, 'You should have admonished him privately and I would have been thankful to you, without hastening to expose him to the scorn of everyone. It is obvious that your motive was not to bring forth the truth in honor—else you would have employed other methods—but you sought to do injury to your comrade and thereafter rejoice in his discomfiture!' A similar relationship applies to God and Israel. For in truth God looks upon Israel as His sons ('Sons are ye to the Eternal your God'), in whose good he rejoices, and by whose evil and disgrace He is troubled. He can find no pleasure in

those who appear before Him—their Father—to denounce them publicly and to no valid purpose.

“When a man is walking and one leg becomes entangled with the other, so that he falls and injures body, face, and the leg itself—he does not seek revenge on the offending member, by preventing its proper healing or expressing sentiments of hate toward it. For what are the legs, the face, the body, but one individual, merely known by its several parts? The injured man only assumes that his sins brought about his fall. Now, if some person had happened to refuse him a favor, or even done him some direct injury, it would still be wrong to indulge in revenge or the bearing of a grudge against this adversary. For what is his neighbor and what is he? Both are of one origin—‘Who is like thy people, like Israel, one nation on earth?’⁹ So also in the phrase, ‘all the souls of the house of Jacob,’¹⁰ the singular of ‘soul’ (*nefesh*) is used instead of the plural, to indicate that the people of Israel, from the seventy who went down to Egypt to the present, are all accounted as one body. There may be limbs of the body politic, heads or hearts, non-vital organs like arms and legs, but all, important or non-important, form one corporate whole.

“The Israelite who imagines himself a disparate entity, apart from society, is in deep error. One sinning Israelite does harm to the entire body of the

9. II Samuel VII, 23.

10. Gen. XLVI, 27.

people; for Israel is indeed like unto a single body, wherein the pain of one portion is felt in every other part. The common similitude is that of a group of men traveling in a ship. One passenger begins boring a bit through the floor of his cabin. His companions demand the reason for his act. He replies, 'What difference is that to you? I am only boring at my own feet.' 'Yes,' they exclaim, 'but the result will be that you will sink us all!'

"Be most wary, therefore, lest you revenge yourself or carry grudges against your neighbors, for you are actually bringing injury upon yourself.¹¹

"One should accustom oneself always to lean favorably in judging a neighbor, to seek justification for his misconduct. If his behavior is evil, presume it was unintentional. Even if his misdeed should prove intentional, assume that he already repented. Beware particularly of defaming Israel. 'Do not calumniate a servant unto his master, lest he curse thee and thou incur guilt. There is a generation that curseth its father, and doth not bless its mother.'¹² The sages say that the juxtaposition of these two sentences indicates that even a generation which curses its father and does not bless its mother must not be denounced before its master—the Holy One, blessed be He. Further understanding of this command may be found in the case of the prophet Isaiah, at the time he beheld the glory of God. 'And I said, woe is me, for I am

11. *Shemirath Halashon* 34:2, ch. 5; 35:2, ch. 6.

12. Proverbs XXX. 10-11.

undone; because a man of unclean lips am I, and in the midst of a people of unclean lips do I dwell . . . ' ¹³ In these words Isaiah cast aspersion upon Israel, and even though he had first belittled himself, and had spoken with the sole intent of declaring himself unfit to face the Lord, both because of his own derelictions and those of the people, it says that this was still considered a sin to be specially forgiven: "Then flew unto me one of the seraphim, and in his hand was a live coal. . . And he touched therewith upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thy iniquity is departed, and thy sin is forgiven." ¹⁴

The author further admonishes us to take heed, to love and respect him that reproves you. He quotes from Proverbs ¹⁵ : "Reprove a wise man and he will love you," to which the sages add: "Love thy critic and hate thy eulogist, the former helps, the latter hates thee." Rabbi Johanan said, "I call heaven and earth to witness that many a time was Akiba punished through me, for I complained about him to Rabban Gamliel, yet Akiba augmented his love for me." ¹⁶

13. VI, 5.

14. See *Shemirath Halashon*, bk. 1. chap. 5. 6, 7.

15. IX, 18.

16. *Arakin* 16b.

CHAPTER XVII

JUSTICE AND CHARITY

Judaism more than any other religion emphasizes the duties, rights and privileges of every individual. It says: "What doth the Lord require of thee but to do justice, to love kindness and walk humbly with thy God."¹

Justice as interpreted by Jewish tradition is an all-embracing moral principle unlimited in its scope and ideal. It is the foundation of all human intercourse and constitutes the cement of the social order. It teaches to be mindful of the needs of others as well as of their rights, "to seek justice, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless and plead for the widow."² Job describes the lofty realization of justice: "I delivered the poor that cried, the fatherless also that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was needy came upon me, and I caused the widows to sing for joy. I put on righteousness and it clothed itself with me. Justice was my robe and my diadem. I was eyes to the blind and feet was I to the lame. I was father to the needy; and the cause of him that I knew not I searched out."³ The Jewish ideal of

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1. Micah VI, 6
 2. Isaiah I, 17
 3. Job XIX, 16.

charity is a splendid example of its sublime interpretation of justice.

To feed the hungry, to help the distressed and provide for the destitute, the Jew deemed an act of justice. His vocabulary does not know of any specific term equivalent to charity or benevolence. What the gentile calls alms-giving, the Hebrew calls *zedakah*, righteousness or justice. In his acts of beneficence to the poor, the observant Jew is prompted by the spirit of justice, by an inward feeling of responsibility for the suffering of others.

In his book, *Abavath Hesed* (The Love of Kindness) the Hafetz Hayim quotes from the Talmud: "God says to him who has means and withholds relief from the needy, 'Keep in mind that it is I who made him poor and thee rich. Do not cause Me to send reverses on thee and make thee poor!'"⁴ The author gives an exhaustive discussion of the high merits of *zedakah* and *hesed*. He asserts that through a devout practice of charity and kindness, man learns to avoid haughtiness and develop a disposition of modesty and humbleness; he is made to realize his moral frailty and repent; his sympathy and compassion with the needy arouses the compassion and forgiveness of Heaven; it awakens in man a feeling of fear, love and reverence for his Maker. He cites the story from the Midrash. To a disciple who lamented the destruction of the Temple, the place where atonement was made for the sins of Israel, Rabbi Johanan

4. *Tanchuma Mishpatim*, edition Buber.

ben Zakkai said: "My son, do not be grieved; we have another way of atonement that is equal in merit to it. What is that? Deeds of kindness, as it is said, 'I desire kindness and not sacrifice.' Charity draws divine mercy down upon the earth; and reconciles Israel with the Eternal.⁵

"*Gemiluth hasadim*" (deeds of kindness, of personal attention, sympathy and service) is superior to *zedakah*; *zedakah* is exercised toward the living, *gemiluth hasadim* to the living and the dead; *zedakah* refers to kindness done to the poor; *gemiluth hasadim* to the poor and the rich; *zedakah* is done with a man's money; *gemiluth hasadim* with his money or his person.⁶

"Furthermore, even the merit of *zedakah* is measured in proportion to the kindness it expresses."

The Hafetz Hayim was a most illustrious exemplar in his exercise of benevolence and kindness. His rectitude was prompted by the sublime spirit of the Law which he translated into conduct par excellence. He frequently pointed out that Abraham our father, though unsurpassed in his loving kindness and hospitality, was chosen by God to become the progenitor of a people destined to become a blessing to all nations, "because he would teach his children and his household to keep the ways of the Eternal, to do righteousness and justice."

Once, while acting in the capacity of a host to a

5. *Aboth d'R. Nathan* IV, 5.

6. *Succah* 49b.

stranger entertained under his roof, he undertook the trouble of preparing the bed for his guest. The latter protested vehemently that the saint should not trouble himself for his sake, and asked at least for permission to assist. But the Hafetz Hayim declined the offer, saying, "No, no, dear sir. You must not help me. It is my *mitzvah*, not yours. I am your host, not you mine," and he illustrated his argument: "When you saw me don my *tefillin* this morning at the synagogue, did you then also offer me your help? Just as you cannot substitute your person for mine in the performance of the *mitzvah* of *tefillin*, so you must not interfere in my performance of the *mitzvah* of *bachnasoth orechim*."

In the summer of 1930, while on his vacation in a nearby village, he waited one afternoon for a tenth man to fill the quorum (*minyan*) for the *minchah* services. He refused to eat his dinner before the prayer. When one of his disciples suddenly beheld a stranger approaching their master's domicile, he happily exclaimed: "Now, Rabbi, we shall have a *minyan*!"

"Don't say that, my son!" the rabbi reprimanded him. "Nowhere in the Torah is it said that when a visitor comes to your home to invite him to pray; but that we have to offer him food, drink and a bed to rest in." As soon as the stranger crossed his threshold, the Hafetz Hayim welcomed him, offered him shelter and immediately invited him to dine at his table.

"All are equal before the majesty of justice; the weak and strong, the poor and wealthy, the native

and stranger, the prince and pauper, the bondsman as well as the freeman. Special emphasis is made upon the treatment of the stranger. The enjoinder not 'to cause vexation to the stranger' is repeated thirty-six times in the Torah.⁷

"Justice must be distributed to every person without exception or distinction. In the case that one of the parties is a poor man and the other rich, judges must not favor the poor because he is poor, nor respect the other because he is rich. The judge must not say to himself, 'This man is poor and must be provided for. Therefore I will render judgment in his favor which may enable him to make an honest living!' In the converse, the judge must not say, 'This man is rich and therefore highly respected in society; why cause him shame and degradation? I shall therefore justify him now and afterwards ask him privately to make good the claim of the poor.' But he must decide between them with impartial and unbiased justice."⁸

Love, sympathy and compassion, however great their virtue, must have their application in the proper place, time and use, so that the grandeur of justice, its profound ideal and purpose be realized.

Abraham Lincoln must have grasped its full significance when he eloquently declared: "With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right."

7. *Baba Metzia* p. 59b.

8. Lev. XIX, 15; Deut. I, 17; See *Rashi*.

CHAPTER XVIII

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

One morning, upon entering the Radun synagogue, the Hafetz Hayim was shocked to see people beating a stranger. The rascal had been caught with some articles belonging to the *shul*. The Hafetz Hayim immediately rescued him from his attackers, whom he reprimanded thus: "The Torah does not permit us to beat a thief. It only authorizes us to impose a fine upon him. By torturing him you commit a worse crime than he did by stealing!"

To be sure, punishment in modern penology is meant either for retaliation, or as a deterrent, or to satisfy the public desire for vengeance. However, according to the teachings of the Hafetz Hayim, the primary motive of Biblical punishment is the salvation of the scoundrel. To quote from the Talmud: "Beloved is man for he was created in the image of God." Also, "Man was created singly to teach that he who causes the destruction of one soul is as though he destroyed a whole world, and he who saves one soul is as though he saved the entire world." The Hafetz Hayim even declared that together with his punishment the culprit also deserves a reward for not falling into a more heinous degradation.

Homicide, of course, is considered the gravest crime. Says Maimonides: "Although there are crimes which seem more serious than homicide, as idolatry for instance, yet the violation of none of them involves the destruction of society so much as murder. A murderer must be made to suffer death. Mercy to criminals is cruelty to all creatures. Toward him, enjoins the Bible, we must not be lenient, and no ransom should be accepted of him, but life shall be exacted for life. The blood itself that has been shed demands recompense from the doer. It causes the defilement and corruption of the land. 'And the land cannot be cleansed of the blood which was spilled therein, but by the blood of him who spilled it.' The noxious thorns in the garden of humanity must be exterminated. Rabbi Akiba said, 'Whoever sheds human blood is considered by Scripture as though he committed a crime against the Divine Pattern.' So long as sinners live, the divine anger rests on the community, but when the murderers are put to death the divine anger disappears."

What Rabbi Akiba declared: "If I had been a member of the Sanhedrin, the death sentence would never have been imposed," should not be taken as proof of his opposition to the principle of capital punishment, due either to a feeling of over-sentimentalism or to some other non-judicial reason. On the contrary, throughout talmudic literature we find that Rabbi Akiba upholds God's retributive justice above all chance of arbitrariness. His statement most

probably was due to the assumption that human justice is imperfect.

True, the culprit deserves the forfeiture of his life in conjunction with the universal principle of measure for measure: that is, punishment should be in proportion to the evil deed. Yet, looking upon the sinner as the victim of folly, it is not the character of the evil deed in itself that we measure, but that of the doer. Our harshness in condemning the delinquent chiefly centers upon malice aforethought, rather than upon the actual misdeed. The sages say, "To deliberate on a sin is worse than the sin itself." Rather than censure what the criminal did, we judge, according to the Jewish law, why and how he did it; namely, the spirit and purpose expressed by his act of crime. Premeditation is the yardstick by means of which the offense is measured, so that the penalty may be in conformity with the amount of depravity. Only, therefore, that power which is capable of measuring punishment in accordance with the spirit of guilt is competent to affix the penalty. But despite his intellectual training and thinking capacity, alas, man fails too often to grasp the thoughts and intentions of others. Moreover, the infliction of a death penalty by court procedure is exercised with perfect intention and sane deliberation. Therefore, in order that the punishment be equal to the crime, such a procedure can be justified only if it be ascertained that the culprit committed his act of violence in a similar state of mind, in a cool and premeditative manner.

As a matter of course, before condemning a person to death, every precaution was taken to exclude the possibility that by punishing an innocent man the witnesses or judges should themselves incur the guilt of judicial murder. Two legal witnesses were therefore needed, to declare that the delinquent was forewarned of the heinousness of the crime, and of the severity of the penalty which would surely come. If after having accepted the warning the murderer committed the crime, he was tried before a court consisting of twenty-three judges, or Sanhedrin, who were learned and God-fearing men, guarding themselves against being bribed even by words.

At the opening of the court a solemn charge was given to the witnesses, cautioning them against testifying to anything of their own inference or that they knew only at second hand, however trustworthy they believed the informant to be. They were bidden remember, that where only property is at stake errors can be redressed, but that when a man's life is involved his blood and that of his posterity clings to the author of his death to the last generation.

But they were also urged not to be deterred by their reflections from giving testimony. The witnesses were carefully cross-examined. They were interrogated about all the details, and circumstances of time and place. The defense as well as the prosecution came from among the judges themselves, to the exclusion of attorneys. The possibility of purchasing justice or of making the law a privilege for

the wealthy was thus prevented. An earnest discussion, under the sense of a solemn responsibility, then took place. Considerations tending to acquittal were given precedence. A vote was taken, and a majority was required for a verdict of guilty. Is there any way of exercising a more thoroughgoing and humane justice?

Still, under normal conditions a Sanhedrin which convicted a person once in seventy years was called a murderous court. Rabbi Akiba maintained that human judges, no matter how great be their integrity and uprightness, are nevertheless likely to make irremediable mistakes. He would have thus widened the scope of diligent inquisition to such an extent that no man might ever be sentenced to death. Compare this to the English courts of Henry VIII, within twenty years of whose reign seventy-two thousand men were sentenced to death.

It goes without saying that circumstantial evidence of the strongest conviction, or hearsay evidence of the most conclusive kind, was not permitted to be accepted as testimony, except when given by two trustworthy witnesses. Rabbi Simon ben Shatach related an instance of his own experience, that at one time he saw one man pursuing another. He followed them, and found the pursued one murdered, and the pursuer holding a sword in his hand dripping with blood. "Culprit," said Rabbi Simon, "who killed that man, I or thou? But what can I do, as thy life-blood is beyond my jurisdiction, because the law re-

quires the evidence of two eye-witnesses? Yet He who knows the inward thoughts of man shall punish him who murdered that man." And it was said that a snake came out and killed the guilty one instantly.

One cannot do evil without suffering evil. The assailant hardly ever will escape his due retribution. Although punishment inflicted by Jewish law has ceased, yet adequate divine penalty has not ceased. God willed it that nature mete out universal justice. The very first human murderer, Cain, was the first thus to meet his deserved penalty. For crime is the seed of punishment, sown upon nature's ground, the fruit of which the sower cannot avoid reaping.

"The judgment belongeth to God; He judgeth in the midst of the powerful on earth." Behind the administration of biblical justice the Jew feels the infinite power of the Almighty, demanding of His creatures, above all, to exercise perfect righteousness.

Hillel, whose love of mankind scarcely knew bounds, whose patience, mildness, and generosity knew no limits, and whose maxim was "Love thy fellow creatures, bring them near the Torah," remarked, however, when once he saw a skull floating upon the surface of the waters—"Because thou drowndest others, they have drowned thee, and they who drowned thee shall themselves be drowned."

When an assault resulted in bodily injury without loss of life it might be treated as a tortious demeanor. The judiciary need not take cognizance if

the suffering party brings no charge. The sages of Judaism construe the text "an eye for an eye," as meaning an adequate payment of damages. Maimonides, citing the Talmud, declares: "That which is stated in the Torah, 'As one has caused a blemish to a man so shall it be rendered unto him,' does not mean that the offender should be punished in exactly the same way as he caused his neighbor to be injured, but it does mean that in principle reparation is due from him, and he is therefore bound to make equitable financial compensation for an injury." He adds, "Not only is this quite clear from the contents of the Written Law, but it was so explained by the mouth of Moses from Mt. Sinai, and has been thus carried into practice by our fathers since the time of Moses." The rabbis, in their refutation of the Sadducees' and Karaites' literal interpretation of "an eye for an eye"¹ argued that such a practice often would have meant a violation of justice instead of a virtuous exercise of it. "Suppose," they argued, "the offender had been possessed of only one eye, and the one whose eye he injured had formerly two eyes, and is therefore still able to enjoy sight with the one eye left, then if you were to blind the assailant totally, where would be the justice of it? Moreover, while to the injured the act of violence having merely caused the loss of an eye proved not fatal, yet to wound the offender might endanger his life in addition to his eye." An

1. That the assailant should suffer a bodily injury similar to that he had inflicted upon his neighbor is declared by Kant as the only just measure of retribution. (*Anfangsgrund der Rechtslehre*, ed. Insel, V, 456.)

approximate restitution is therefore ordained as a fair compensation for the lost organ.²

To sum up, the furtherance and propagation of the human race on earth was the Providential purpose in the creation of life. It therefore follows that he who presumptuously violates that design deserves a corresponding punishment. So it appears from the very proximity of the Biblical verse, "And be ye fruitful and multiply; bring forth abundantly on the earth and multiply thereon," to the verse, "Whosoever sheddeth man's blood, his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God made He man."³ "Measure for measure" is the governing principle in nature. In dwelling upon the severity of punishment, the Torah meant mostly to indicate the immensity of wickedness and the grave effect of crime. Such a knowledge is a far more impressive deterrent than the infliction of punishment. The reign of justice will attain its most splendid glory, its most perfect sublimity, with the realization of Israel's hopes. Judaism, unlike Christianity, anticipates a Messiah, who will build up the Temple of Justice in its full magnificence. "He will judge the poor with justice, and will decide with righteousness for the suffering of the earth and shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his mouth shall

2. *Baba Kama* 83b; *Sanhedrin* 40b-41a; *Maimonides*, Laws of Murder IV; Laws of Injury I-VI; *Guide for the Perplexed*, part 3, ch. XL; R. Saadia *Gaon* and the Karaite ben Zuta quoted by Ibn Ezra on Exodus XXI, 24.

3. Gen. IX, 6-7.

he kill the wicked, and righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins . . . Zion shall be redeemed in justice and her converts in righteousness."⁴ The redemption of Israel, the salvation of humanity, universal peace and felicity, all depend primarily upon the exercise of justice in its broadest sense.

4. Isaiah I, 27; IX, 1-5.

CHAPTER XIX

ON WAR AND PEACE

In every country, there are conscientious elements working constantly for peace, though their voices seem now and then to be silenced by the turmoil of the super-patriots and jingoists.

Modern diplomacy is synonymous with hypocrisy. Publicly, official spokesmen assure us that the policy of their respective governments is that of peace and international friendship, while secretly they urge their compatriots to devote their time and ingenuity to devising means to kill other people in war. They prefix their pacifist statements with the word "if"—that is, "We want peace, if our neighbors will let us civilize them and allow us a free hand in all the claims we deem essential to our well-being." This holds true of all types of governments that are not truly representative of the people. The usurpation of foreign lands and markets is almost always their sole ambition. Their eloquence is but a means to conceal their malicious thoughts, their egotistic pride, and greed for power.

It behooves us to borrow an illustration from the famous *Dubner Maggid*. Once a husband and wife kept on quarreling, cursing each other, and hurling

pots and pans, or whatever else they could get hold of. They consequently lost all their trade, for the customers hated to see them fight. When they saw their business on the verge of ruin, they at last came to an agreement. In the future, they decided to quarrel with words of endearment. "Paradise" would really mean "hell"; "long life," "immediate death," and blessings were to imply curses. They succeeded in regaining some of their customers. The latter believed the couple had become reconciled.

One day, when they became exceedingly heated in argument, the husband shouted, "Long life to you, my dear!" while the woman seized a pan and threw it at his face. The husband answered the challenge by hurling a chair at her with shrieks of "Honey! Darling!" thereby causing her to bleed profusely.

Similarly, our modern diplomats and representatives are not much different from their barbaric prototypes, save in their skill in the art of speech. While shouting peace with their lips, they are ready to grab at their neighbors' throats . . .

True and genuine peace has ever been a dream rather than a reality. It is not peace, but some forms of truce that mankind has enjoyed, simply intermissions between the scenes of bloody battles. Peace supported by bayonets and dictated by superior force, while satisfying the conquerors, has humiliated the vanquished; and has consequently imbued the latter with desire for revenge. As long as might instead of right determines the status of nations, there can

be no real justice. For the flower of peace cannot grow where the weeds of greed, hatred, and vengeance triumph.

Peace must be for the good of all mankind; if it is to be a true blessing it must serve the general welfare. It was just this kind of peace that the Hebrew prophets visualized, and for which Jews have prayed throughout the ages. It is a peace that will know neither oppressors nor oppressed. In a world like ours, where nations are armed tooth and nail against one another, such a hope may seem to belong to the idle vision of a Utopia; yet the Jew, in spite of the overhanging clouds of gloom, sees the beams of light and faith peeping through. To him it is quite conceivable to anticipate the realization of the words of the Psalmist: "The Eternal reigneth; let the whole earth be glad; the many isles will then rejoice."¹ Like the prophecy that the lamb shall dwell together with the wolf,² so the small nations, even the minutest kingdoms, will dwell side by side in freedom and tranquillity with their mightier neighbors.

Such was the vision of the Hafetz Hayim.

1. Psalms 97, 1.

2. Isaiah 6.

CHAPTER XX

LIFE AND DEATH

"Akavya ben Mahalalel said, Reflect on three things, and thou wilt not come within the power of sin: Consider whence thou comest, whither thou goest, and in whose presence must thou hereafter render an account in judgment."¹ This the Hafetz Hayim was wont to explain: "'Consider whence thou comest.' Oh, son of man, you are the offspring of a father who was here sometime ago, but where is he now? He is gone. And where are the progenitors of your parents? Also gone. 'And whither art thou going?' Do you think that you have a permanent lease here on earth, and that you will stay continuously here? Remember that sooner or later you too must move from your earthly premises and 'render an account in judgment!'"

Man is said to be a pilgrim on earth. He is a traveler tarrying here and there, until he arrives at the destination appointed for him. He is then forced to leave his friends and neighbors, the house and possessions which he has acquired, and all near and dear to his heart.

There is a story told of a pilgrim who in his

1. *Abotb* III, 1.

wanderings entered the palace of a prince. He spread his bed in one of its ante-chambers, pretending that he had mistaken the building for an inn. The prince, amused by the oddity of the act, ordered the wanderer to be brought before him, and asked the stranger how he had come to make such a mistake.

"What is an inn?" the traveler asked.

"A place where travelers rest a little before proceeding on their journey."

"Who dwelt here before you?" again asked the pilgrim.

"My father," was the prince's reply.

"And did he remain here?"

"No!" was the answer. "He died and went away."

"And who dwelt here before him?"

"His ancestors."

"And did they remain here?"

"No, they also died and went away."

"Then," rejoined the pilgrim, "I have made no mistake, for your palace is nothing but an inn after all."

He was right, of course. Our houses are but inns, temporary dwelling places; the rabbis called them vestibules. Hence: "Prepare thyself in the vestibule, so that thou mayest enter the portals of the palace in the world to come."

CHAPTER XXI

THE KADDISH

The *Kaddish* is the most popular and most thrilling prayer in the Hebrew lithurgy. It brings hope, solace and comfort to the living and assures immortality and celestial felicity to the departed ones.

The custom of sons to recite the *Kaddish* during the eleven months following the death of either parent and thereafter on the *yahrzeit* (anniversary of the day of death) is traced by Rabbi Isaac of Vienna, in his book *Or Zarua*, to the following legend. Rabbi Akiba met the ghost of Ukba of Ludikin, who proclaimed that as a punishment for having maltreated the poor while tax collector, he was each day sent forth to collect fuel for the *Gebenna* in which he was himself burnt. He also told the rabbi that he would be released from his awful torture if his son would be able to stand before the congregation and summon them to prayer either by reciting the *Kaddish*, or the formula *Barechu*. On learning that he had utterly neglected the education of his son, R. Akiba sought the boy out. He cared for and educated the youth so that one day he stood before the congregation and

recited the *Barechu* and the *Kaddish*, and thereafter his father found rest.¹

Many wonder why the *Kaddish* does not contain any reference to the dead, or prayer for the soul. The truth is, however, that the *Kaddish* is much more than an ordinary prayer.

"Magnified and sanctified be His great name," is the opening of this supplication, the origin of which, a medieval German Jewish poet remarked, "is mysterious; angels are said to have brought it down from heaven and taught it to man; about this prayer the tenderest threads of filial feeling and human recollections are entwined."

Indeed, like a charm it helps to keep the living together and form a bridge to the mysterious realm of the dead.

Likewise, it is an expression on the part of the mourners of their loyalty and faithfulness to God, and to His ways of justice and righteousness. They surrender to His will, without murmur or complaint. In spite of their severe trial, they justify His action by magnifying and sanctifying His great name.

Furthermore, the universal sanctification of the Eternal, the acknowledgment of His kingdom by all mankind, is hoped to be realized some time in the near future, with the advent of the Messiah. That era, the faithful believe, will likewise see the resurrection of the dead. The Jew thus prays that the

1. See *Shemirath Halashon* VII, where the Hafetz Hayim cites many quotations on the importance of the *Kaddish* in the education of the young.

divine glory and grandeur be soon realized, so that his beloved dead may return to life.²

To this the Hafetz Hayim added a parable: A king ordered one of his friends to be imprisoned on a charge of treason. Instead of applying the usual means of petitioning the king, the children of the prisoner thought of a more effective way. They prepared a gorgeous bouquet of fragrant flowers, and pinned thereon a card containing a beautiful poem in praise of the king's kindness and mercy.

One morning they waited at the royal palace as the ruler was leaving for a walk in his garden, and presented it to his majesty. Upon learning who they were, the king became all the more touched by their brave deed of loyalty and devotion, and for their sake he forgave their father.

"This," the sage concluded, "is what the *Kaddish* really signifies. In a spiritual sense it is the bouquet of flowers which the children, in their anxiety, offer to the King of Kings with the hope of obtaining divine leniency and compassion for their parents."³

2. See Joseph Caro, *Tur Orach Hayim*, 56:1.

3. In reference to the *Kaddish* there is a popular legend that once, on the Day of Atonement, the celebrated Rabbi Levi Isaac of Berditchev addressed his flock as follows: "Brethren, you must know that at this moment a strife is being carried on in heaven among the guardian angels of the different nations—each of them maintaining that the particular nation which he represents has the justest claim to rule the world. The English pray for the pre-eminence of their king, the Germans for the superiority of their Kaiser, and the Russians for the exaltation of their Czar." The rabbi then lifted his eyes to heaven and said: "But I, *Levi Isaac*, pray; *Yisgadal v'yiskadasb shmei rabba*—His name alone shall be magnified and sanctified; that is, may it please the Omnipotent Creator to proclaim His Kingdom throughout the universe; that He alone reign over all His world!"

CHAPTER XXII

ON A TOMBSTONE

Short and simple is the story recorded on a tombstone. As usual, the featured epitaph contains the dates when the departed was born and when he died. It seems as though this alone tells the whole story of human life. He was born and he died—all that there is to life; nothing more.

The brevity of life is, indeed, a saddening truth. Before one has a chance to look around he is gone, "like a dream that disappeareth, like a shadow that passeth away."

"There is a season for everything and a time for every purpose under the heavens. A time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to pluck up that which is planted."

Here Solomon does not say that there is also a time to live. He only declares, "There is a time to be born and a time to die." All that there is to life is to be born and to die. The span of life is so brief, its endurance so short, that Solomon did not think it worthwhile to mention it.¹ From the day he is born man runs to meet death, and as a flower fades and the

1. There is a legend that Methuselah, who according to the Biblical record lived longer than any other human creature, refused to engage in the building

worm decays so does man sink into the grave to be dissolved into dust, while the spirit "returneth unto God who gave it."

Says the Talmud, "The pious need no monument, for their words are their best memorial."² By this the sages did not refer to the words engraved on stone or bronze, but to the indelible instructions which the deceased left imprinted upon the hearts and souls of the survivors.

"For," declared the Hafetz Hayim, "the magnificence and ornamentation of the monument, the expensive gold lettering and profusion of flowery designs and other emblems of life's pleasure add nothing to the merits and contentment of the soul. It is thus a vain and futile act on the part of the children to squander great sums of money on such things.

"The soul that has quitted this earth knows the true worth of the Law and the commandments, and is aware that only this kind of spiritual merchandise can attain the worlds beyond. Rather let the mourner perform commandments of righteousness in this world, than seek vain pleasures and honors concerning which he must make an accounting in the next world. Often a man who has throughout his days sought things of vanity and who, at the reckoning, feels assured that the good and proper deeds of his sons will redeem him, discovers that they too are

of a house for himself. He argued that it did not pay to waste precious time on such things, as he had but 969 years allotted for his stay on earth.

2. *Jerus. T. Shek*, II, 5.

practicing occupations of vanity. It were better that they set up a plain monument without excessive ornamentation, and that with the money remaining they support Jewish institutions of learning, or perform deeds of charity and kindness, in the name of the honored dead.

"Every meritorious act of the descendants is added to the score of worth of the dead, and serves as a partial redemption from life's iniquities; moreover, it keeps them from the judgment and torments of *Gehinnom*. The *Zohar* declares that the honor of parents must persist after their death; and the son who lives uprightly honors his father before the world of men and before the kingdom of God. Ultimately God conducts the father to the throne of glory. If a son can thus bring his parent to Paradise, he can certainly keep him from *Gebenna* and its torments. Sons must recall how diligently parents labor to bring their offspring to proper man's estate, so that through them the punishment of the departed may be mitigated."

The Hafetz Hayim thus advocated simplicity not only in every avenue of life but also in the domain of the dead.

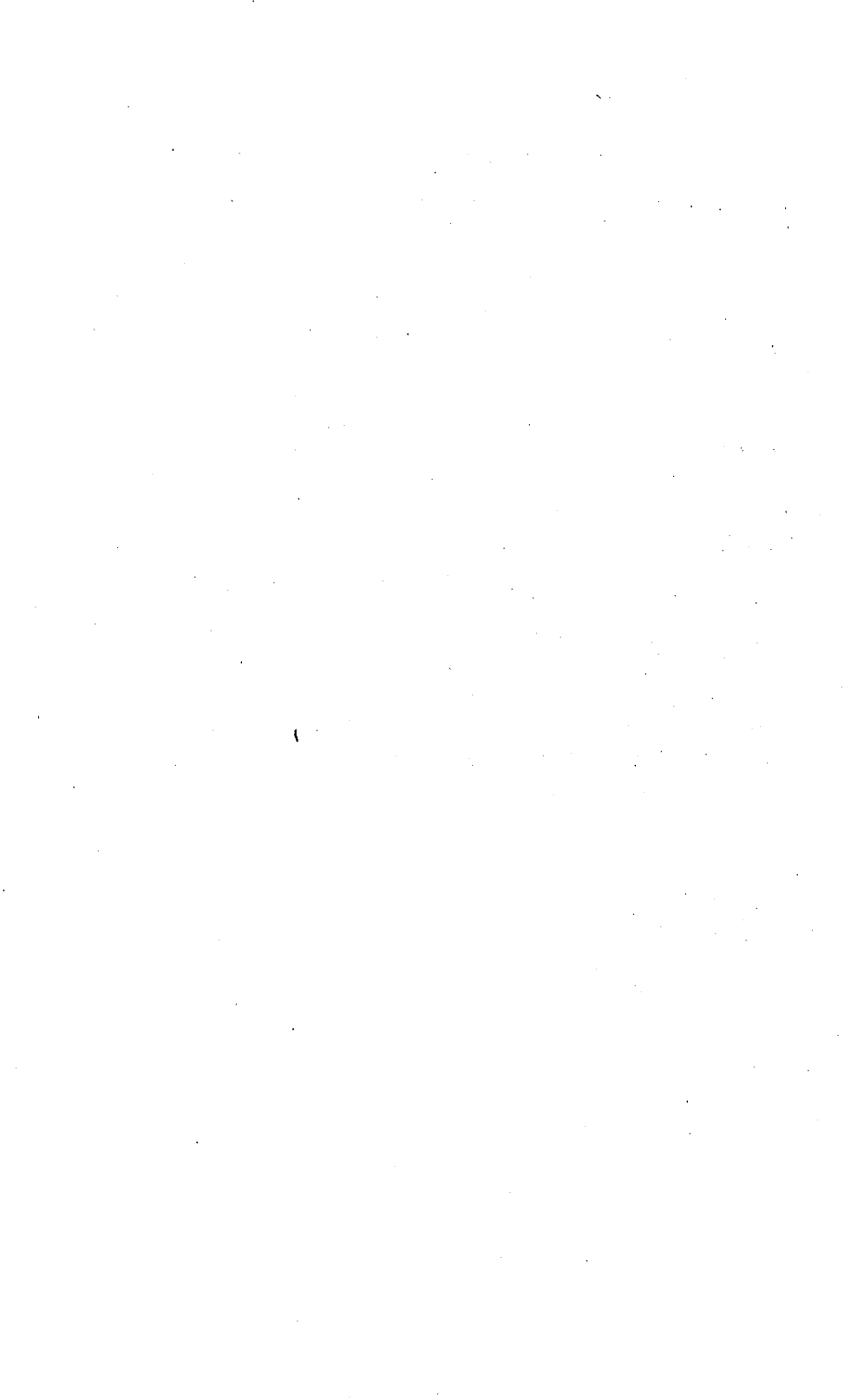
The little tombstone on the grave of his beloved son Abraham contains but the following epitaph: "Here rests the boy Abraham, son of Israel Meir HaCohen, who died the 20th day of Kislev, 5652."

His son Abraham was an extraordinary youthful genius. When he died, his father was out of town.

The father returned home after the people had come back from the burial. In spite of his great attachment to his departed son he did not weep, but recited the passage: "The Lord hath given, and the Lord hath taken away. May the name of the Eternal be blessed."

After eulogizing the deceased, he related the story of a saint who, after losing his only son, found consolation in the thought that while the son was alive, his own love for the Eternal had not been whole-hearted because of the love he treasured for his offspring. Now that the son was gone, he would be able to love God with all his heart and soul without reservation. The Hafetz Hayim, stirred by this recollection, then rose and declared: "Oh, Merciful Father! I shall now devote the love I felt for my son to Thee!"

In a letter to a friend of his, he wrote, "My consolation is that with such a son I shall not feel ashamed in the Hereafter."



PART THREE

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THE JEWISH WOMAN

**HER INDIVIDUALITY, MORAL STAMINA
AND PERSONALITY, INTERSPERSED WITH
THE TEACHINGS OF THE HAFETZ HAYIM
AS BASIC PRINCIPLES**

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CHAPTER I
THE INDIVIDUALITY OF JEWISH WOMAN
A COMPARATIVE STUDY

The status of woman in Judaism is that of individuality and distinction. The Torah gives due recognition to the personality of woman, to her innate and peculiar characteristics. Even in the most primitive stages of Israel's history, an honored position, sanctified both by affection and tradition, was accorded to the wife and mother. Her dignity and independence were guarded and respected as in no other nation of antiquity. Jewish women of rare quality have achieved an immortal reputation. The late Professor Moore declared: "The legal status of woman under Jewish law compares to its advantage with that of contemporary civilizations, and represents a development of the biblical legislation consistently favorable to woman."¹

The feminine struggle for enfranchisement during the nineteenth century resulted in a gradual reform of the old disabilities. Centuries-hallowed traditions of female disqualifications and inferiority have been replaced by new legislation. Modern woman boasts of being the equal of man. She points with

1. *Judaism*, Vol. II. 126.

pride to the modern statutes granting her all possible opportunities and privileges. Nevertheless, however progressive our modern codes may be, in reality woman is far from being completely emancipated. Ours is still too much of a society organized and governed by men, of men, and for men.

As a matter of course, law is rarely successful in shaping or transforming society. It is society that molds and affects the progress of law. No matter how ideal and noble the purpose of a given statute, it takes a long time before it becomes fully absorbed within the life-blood of society.

It is enough to mention the Civil War, waged primarily to liberate the Negro. A special amendment to the Constitution of the United States declared the colored race free and equal before the law. But is the Negro free and equal? Is he free and equal in the South? The amendment is largely a dead letter.

Similarly, the proclamation of woman suffrage failed to uproot the age-old prejudice against feminine pretensions. Although there is hardly a field which has been cultivated without the assistance of woman, yet in most sciences as well as in politics, government and industry, we can point to few women as occupants of pre-eminent positions. This may be due to the fact that woman's movement of emancipation is comparatively young.

Yet ours may be hailed as the age that liberated woman, if we contrast the present situation with her status in olden times. In ancient society, woman was

considered little higher than a slave. She was treated by her savage male as part of his chattels. With the advancement of civilization, man gradually learned to humanize his attitude toward woman.

Christianity exaggerates in its boast that it liberated woman and ennobled marriage. A careful examination of the early Christian writings prove the contrary to be true. Woman's position in Christendom is that of inferiority. Throughout the Christian Bible she is branded as the source of all human evil; married life is considered an obstacle toward the attainment of heavenly bliss; celibacy and virginity are highly recommended virtues. It explicitly declares: "Man was not created for woman but woman for man."² "Wives are to be in subjection to their husbands."³ "But shouldst thou marry, thou hast not sinned, and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned. Yet such have tribulation in the flesh and I would spare you. . . . And he who hath given her (his virgin daughter) not in marriage, shall do better."⁴ The best we can say is that the authors of the Gospels merely tolerated woman and the matrimonial state as a necessary evil. The church invented a new form of marriage—substituting mystic or spiritual wedlock with the Nazarene for that which enjoins that "they shall become one flesh."

2. I Corinthians XI, 9.

3. Colossians III, 18.

4. I Corinthians VII, 28-37

Even old Greece, the classical land of polished mannerism and physical grace, was not so liberal to woman as one may now believe. Aristotle designated woman as an incomplete or mutilated man. Compared to other Greek philosophers, he was mild in declaring, "Man has the courage to command; woman to serve."

These peoples of old, Greeks or Romans, Persians or Egyptians, idealized might rather than right, like many in our own era. Insomuch as woman is physically weaker than man, she was victimized by being subordinated and degraded.

True, in the classical literature of Greece and Rome, we find some great women. There is "burning" Sappho, who loved and sang. There is Cleopatra, who ruled the rulers of Rome with her feminine charms. And there is Empress Theodora who, though cruel and tyrannical, is said to have aided in the codification of the Roman law.

A contrasting picture, however, is the history of prominent personalities of Israel's womanhood prior to the modern era. Theirs may be a distinction in different channels, as the general trend of Jewish thought and feeling is different from that of other creeds and races. Judaism neither gave free vent to the human passions, as did Hellenism or Paganism, nor did it favor excessive asceticism, as did Christian-

ity. Its primary ideal is restraint and moderation in every walk of life. From his earliest dawn, the Jew developed a keen longing, a passionate love for justice and righteousness. Hence, since time immemorial, Jewish womanhood has enjoyed a state of recognition and respect. This is particularly true during those periods when Israel lived a life of his own, undisturbed by hostile elements from without.

"Man, waging the war for life and existence, mobilizing all the forces at his command to provide for his family, and the wife, remaining at home to fulfill her household duties, together must share the benefits as well as the responsibilities, for it is written:

"As is the share of him that goeth down to the battle, so shall be the share of him that tarrieth by the baggage; they shall share alike,"⁵ says the Hafetz Hayim.

5. I Samuel XXX, 24

CHAPTER II

THE MATRIARCHS

The freedom of Jewish women is an experience as old as Jewish history. Sarah, the first Jewish woman, represents a picturesque personality. While Abraham taught men to break their idols and acknowledge the true God, Mother Sarah instructed women in the same manner. Hers was a spirit of independence. At her home she insisted upon her authority. Here she determined to remain the sole mistress, suffering no rival and tolerating no antagonism. In compliance with ancient custom, on realizing her barrenness, she urged Abraham to marry her slave, Hagar, in order that she might bear him a child. But Hagar, instead of feeling grateful, defied the authority of her benefactress. Later, when Isaac, her promised son, was born, his training was endangered by the presence of the uncouth Ishmael. The intrigues of her former slave threatened to break the harmony of her home. Thereupon Sarah urged that Hagar be sent from under the roof of her home. And God stood by her. In clear words His message came to Abraham, "In all that Sarah may say unto thee hearken unto her voice." Sarah is thus the pioneer champion of woman's rights.

Moreover, tradition has it that Abraham was secondary to Sarah in his powers of prophetic vision; that the door of her tent was kept wide open in order to welcome wayfarers and strangers; and that her Sabbath lamps were kept burning from one Sabbath eve to another. As long as she lived, the sacred *Shechinah* did not depart from her tent; when she departed, the *Shechinah* too moved off, to return only with the coming of Rebekah.

Rebekah, the second of the matriarchs, is known to us since her early maidenhood from the time when Eliezer first glanced at her. We admire her originality, the frankness and wisdom of her demeanor. We are impressed by her offer to give drink to Eliezer and water his camels. In response to Eliezer's proposal to give her in marriage to Isaac, his master's son, her folks said, "We shall call the maiden and inquire her own decision." Where else in the history of the ancients do we find such an example of independence enjoyed by a young maiden? As a matter of fact, the custom still prevails in the East for the father, without consulting his daughter, to give or sell her into marriage. As wife and mother, Rebekah was the dominating influence at her hearth. In her wisdom she procured the parental blessing and with it the spiritual heritage for her favorite son, Jacob. She also made Jacob go to Haran and marry into her family.

Jacob himself rolled the heavy stone from the mouth of the well when he beheld Rachel approaching. For her he served Laban fourteen years. These

are the first known instances of deeds of chivalry to win a maiden's love. When God advised him to return to the land of his fathers, Jacob, instead of ordering his wives to do his will, called them into consultation and awaited their decision. Rachel and Leah debated with dignity and self-respect. They exclaimed, "Is there yet any portion, or inheritance, for us in our father's house? Were we not counted by him as strangers, for he hath sold us, and quite consumed our money?"

"Patience, kindness and forbearance ought to dominate man's attitude toward his wife. Failure to exercise these qualities may not only cause disturbance to his personal happiness but also to that of posterity." This the Hafetz Hayim illustrates from the Midrash:

"When Rachel saw that she was barren, she besought Jacob: 'Pray unto God for me that He grant me children, or else I die.' Jacob's anger against Rachel was kindled and he said: 'Am I in God's stead who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?' God, displeased with this answer, rebuked Jacob: 'Is it thus thou wouldst comfort a grief-stricken heart? As thou livest, the day will come when thy children will stand before the son of Rachel and he will use the same words thou hast just used saying—Am I in place of the Lord?' " (*Shemirath Halashon*).

In Jewish legend, Mother Rachel has become the cherished patroness of her people, ever ready to inter-

cede with the Eternal on behalf of her tormented children. Her tears, rather than those shed by the patriarchs, are said to have aroused God's mercy. In His infinite compassion the Eternal assured her: "For thy sake, O Rachel, I will lead the children of Israel back to their land." ¹

When Rachel died, Jacob erected a monument upon her grave. "The same is the pillar on Rachel's grave, to this day." ² The very existence of this pillar for nearly 4,000 years is in itself a phenomenon of profound significance. The burial place of Moses has been left unknown to us. Upon the grave of Aaron no tombstone has been erected. But the tomb of Rachel still stands. Her shrine towers prominently on the road to Bethlehem. To the weary and destitute Israelites it has since served as a spiritual fountain of strength and inspiration. Throughout the ages it has been a center for pilgrimages.

1. Jeremiah, XXXI, 15.

2. Genesis, XXXV, 20.

CHAPTER III

WOMEN IN THE TIME OF MOSES

"And his sister stood at a distance (watching her baby brother Moses floating on the Nile) to ascertain what would be done to him." ¹

"The Hebrew text suggests ² that Miriam (by virtue of her faith and vision) knew in her heart that Moses would be rescued, but did not know how his salvation was bound to come."

—HAFETZ HAYIM.

The courage and piety of Israel's women in Egypt saved the people from being utterly crushed by their bondage. When Pharaoh decreed that every male infant born to the Hebrews be killed, it was the sagacity and fortitude of the midwives Shifrah and Puah that circumvented his brutality. The bravery and wisdom of Jochebed and Miriam saved Israel's Savior, Moses, from perishing in the waves of the Nile. The sages speak of the national identity preserved by the Hebrews in Egypt; they spoke their Holy Tongue, called themselves by their Hebrew names, dressed according to their own traditional

1. Exodus II, 4.

2. See Rashi's interpretation of similar expression—Numbers XV, 35.

style, and observed the Jewish manner of family purity. That women were chiefly responsible for the safeguarding of these traditions is evident from the rabbis, who stated that the virtues of the women merited the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt.

At the Red Sea, we find Miriam by the side of her brothers, in the role of a feminine leader. In her exaltation, she kindled the enthusiasm of her sisters. "And Miriam took a timbrel in her hand and all the women went after her with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam said to them: Let us sing unto the Lord, for strength and sublimity are His!" What is more amazing, those women had perfect faith that God would perform miracles and deeds of glory for them. Hence they provided themselves with timbrels and flutes that they might have them at hand to glorify their anticipated triumphs. That same spirit of loyalty they manifested throughout their wanderings in the wilderness. When the men urged their mates and daughters to give up their jewelry for the making of the golden calf—they refused. Likewise, in the rebellion of the spies, the women took no part. But when Moses asked them to contribute toward the erection of the Tabernacle, they joyfully brought many more offerings than were actually needed. The sages have remarked: "Women of that generation rebuilt what men in their folly destroyed."³

Brave pioneers in the battle for woman's equality were the five daughters of Zelaphehad. They appear-

3. Exodus R. 21.

ed in person to plead their rights of inheritance before Moses, Eliezer the high priest, the princes, and the congregation, at the door of the Tabernacle. They said: "Why should the name of our father be done away from the midst of his family because he had no son? Give us, therefore, a possession (in the Holy Land) among the brothers of our father." And they were given full satisfaction. God said to Moses: "The daughters of Zelaphehad speak rightly. Thou shalt give them a possession of an inheritance among their father's brethren; and thou shalt cause the inheritance of their father to pass unto them."

There is a very quaint talmudic legend which gives divine sanction to woman's claim of individuality. When the Eternal was about to proclaim His Law at Mt. Sinai, he instructed Moses, "Thus shalt thou speak to the house of Jacob, and say to the children of Israel." "*The house of Jacob*," say the rabbis, "refers to women, and *children of Israel* to men." God advised Moses to speak to women first; for, He said: "When I created the world, I first commanded Adam and later Eve not to eat of the forbidden fruit. But—she was first to succumb to temptation and, by breaking My command, she spoiled the case of the world. Now, if I do not call upon woman first, she again may cause the violation of others of My commandments."

CHAPTER IV

NATIONAL HEROINES

"While every Jewish holiday gives due recognition to the personality and virtue of woman; HANUKAH with its story of Judith and PURIM with that of Esther, are magnificent monuments to her heroism and genius."

—HAFETZ HAYIM.

There have been a great many celebrities in the history of Jewish womanhood, but Deborah, the prophetess, excels them all. Hers was a pre-eminent genius and a dynamic personality. She was gifted with a vigorous and extraordinary mind. She was neither a princess nor descendant of a high priest, but a daughter of simple parents and wife of a plain man. It is amazing how she proved capable of filling so many responsible offices at one time! Besides prophetess, she was a poetess *par excellence*, a wise judge, a profound teacher, and what is more astonishing, a commander in battle, yet above all—a "mother in Israel." In her modesty, Deborah first urged Barak to go to war by himself, prophesying victory to him. When he hesitated to go without her, she reminded him that unless he went alone, to a woman would be accredited the victory. He still insisted that she ac-

company him. She was forced to leave her quiet home for the turmoil and risk of the battlefield. She organized the army, planned the campaign, cheered the fighters, and denounced the slackers. Upon achieving the victory, she burst into a song of triumph which only the psalmists and prophets have equaled in beauty. This song is recited annually in all the synagogues side by side with that of Moses, and as a *Haftorah*, it is part of the service of *Shabbath Shirah* (Sabbath of Song).

Samuel—a leading prophet and judge in Israel, whose personality the Talmud ranks as eminent as that of Moses and Aaron—owed his high position primarily to Hannah, his mother, who was endowed with the gift of prophecy. In the account of his birth, the name of Elkanah, his father, remains in the background; but Hannah is portrayed as a profound religious personality imbued with a flaming zeal and faith. The very fact that she, a woman, took a vow as a nazarite, proves her initiative and independence.

Hannah's direct and personal communion with God has no other example among women in Holy Writ. And when the son was granted, the name which he bore and introduced him first into the world, expressed her sense of the urgency of her entreaty, *Samuel* "The Asked" or "Heard of God." Before his very birth she had dedicated him to the service of God. As soon as he was weaned, she herself, accompanied by her husband, brought him to the Tabernacle at Shiloh, where she solemnly consecrated him.

The hymn following the consecration is an outpouring of deepest gratitude and faithfulness, and has been incorporated in the *Haftorah* read on Rosh Hashanah.

"Hannah," says the Talmud, "was the first to designate God by the attribute *Zebaoth*, 'the Lord of Hosts.'" In the manner of her praying and in her very deportment on that occasion, the sages saw an ideal example for all to follow. "Many important laws," they say, "can be inferred from this incident in the life of Hannah."

The version of her prayer, in part, is believed to have been:

"Lord of the World! Hast Thou created aught in vain? Our eyes Thou hast destined for sight, our ears for hearing, our mouth for speech, our nose wherewith to smell, our hands for work. Didst Thou not create these breasts above my heart to give suck to a babe? O, grant me a son, that he may draw nourishment therefrom . . ." ¹

Quite a daring and compelling plea, indeed.

In the days of King Saul, the women came out of all the cities of Israel to welcome Saul and David upon their triumphant return from the Philistines. They greeted their heroes "with songs and dances, with tambourines, with timbrels, and with other instruments of music." They seemed to have formed an opinion of their own about the event, as they chanted:

"Saul hath slain his thousands,
And David his ten thousands." ²

1. *Yalkut Shimoni* I Samuel, II.

2. I Samuel XVII, 7.

Theirs was a voluntary and spontaneous act. They seem to have moved freely without restriction. This testifies to the free social position women enjoyed in those days. Furthermore, the fact that they knew how to sing and play, how to make verses of their own and use the various instruments, demonstrates the education these daughters in Israel achieved.

Huldah, the prophetess, is another example of feminine distinction. It is related that when King Josiah realized the people's demoralization and their ingratitude toward God, he was filled with deep sorrow. In his consternation, he rent his clothes and sent messengers to learn the judgment of the Eternal. And to whom were his high officers sent? Neither to the prophet Jeremiah, nor to Zephaniah, but to prophetess Huldah. They found her abiding in the college near the Temple. Thereafter she was consulted by Josiah as readily and authoritatively as were Isaiah by King Hezekiah and Jeremiah by King Zedekiah.

Two of the twenty-four books of the Jewish Bible receive their titles from the names of women: Ruth and Esther. An impressive tribute is also the ritual custom of reading the Book of Ruth at the synagogue on *Shovuo*, the feast that marks the anniversary of Israel's receiving the Torah. This is the occasion for the reciting the story of a heroine, an idyllic episode narrating the origin of the royal family of David.

The Feast of Purim is ushered in by the recital of the Book of Esther, which tells the story of a Jewess

who was elevated by Ahasuerus to the rank of queen and, notwithstanding her exalted station, remained loyal to her people. When Haman threatened to annihilate them, at the risk of her life, she interceded with the king in their behalf.

One of the seven prophetesses spoken of in the Talmud is Abigail. She too is portrayed as a forceful personality. Her rich but low-spirited husband, Nabal, refused David and his fugitives a gift of food. When Abigail learned of the incident she immediately dispatched an offering and went personally to offer an apology. She addressed David fearlessly and yet so modestly, that he was deeply touched, as he answered: "Blessed be the Eternal, the God of Israel, Who sent thee this day to meet me. Blessed be thy intelligence and blessed be thou who hast prevented me this day from coming into bloodguiltiness."

During the Second Commonwealth, there lived the charming and noble Judith, who is reputed to have aroused the Maccabean brothers in their fight against the Syrians. There is also Queen Salome Alexandra, an outstanding genius. In her capacity as ruler she proved worthy of her great task. She knew how to keep the people united in peace, and to defend her country against its enemies. Such records of leadership on the part of Hebrew women are a striking refutation of Martin Luther's assertion: "Never any good came out of female domination."

CHAPTER V

WOMEN IN THE DIASPORA

Women of rare greatness are also singled out in the Talmud. Chief among them ranks Beruriah, wife of Rabbi Meir. Her brilliant intellect gained her the highest esteem of the sages. They endorsed her opinions in matters of law and tradition. It is stated that on one day she studied three hundred talmudic subjects. She is also said to have devoted three years to studying the records of genealogy.

Ima Shalom, wife of Rabbi Eliezer, is another figure who is reported to have taken a leading part in establishing schools throughout the nation.

Yaltha, wife of Rabbi Nahman (a talmudic sage of the later period) was an illustrious scholar, thoroughly versed in Jewish lore and traditions. Her opinions and interpretations were frequently cited as wise and authoritative.

Abaye, a leading sage in Babylon, is said to have gained most of his medical, surgical, psychological, and pedagogical knowledge from his nurse and foster mother.

Even during the gloomy ages of Medievalism, the Jewish sky had been illuminated by feminine brightness. The family of Rashi not only is famous for its

sons, but also for its renowned daughters, who wielded their influence upon the Jewish community. Bellette, daughter of Menahem of Orleans (1100 c. E.), is cited by Rashi as a reliable authority on ritual questions. Bath Halevi, daughter of Rabbi Samuel of Baghdad (1200 c. E.), is reported to have assembled around her hundreds of scholars, who came to listen to her lectures. She took the precaution, however, of sitting in a case of dark glass, in order that her beauty should not divert the attention of the students. Bella, wife of R. Joshua Falk (born in Lemberg, 1600), possessed great talmudic scholarship. One of her *halachic* decisions is referred to by the *Shulchan Aruch* authorities—*Orach Hayim* 263, 12.¹

Neither the horrors of the ghetto nor the tortures of the Inquisition nor the fire and sword of persecution, ever dimmed the genius of Jewish womanhood. Besides wearing the crown of perfect wifedom and ideal motherhood, the Jewish woman distinguished herself in every avenue of human endeavor. Of the few notable women of the sixteenth century, Benvenida Abarbanala ranks supreme. She is spoken of by her contemporaries with veneration. The historian describes her as "tender hearted, deeply religious, wise, and courageous; she was the pattern of refinement and high breeding." Don Pedro, the powerful Spanish Viceroy of Naples, held her in such esteem that he chose her as a companion, instructor, and adviser of his daughter Lenora. When the latter became

1. *The Jewish Encyclopedia*

Duchess of Tuscany, she kept up her acquaintance with the Jewish lady, whom she called mother, and for whose sake she defended the Jews.

Not only have women excelled in matters of religion and culture; they have achieved pre-eminence in worldly affairs as well. Esther Kiera served as physician and politician at the courts of three Sultans of Constantinople. She gained international renown and exerted a powerful influence upon many diplomatic transactions. She was devoted to her co-religionists, being ever ready to help them in their need. She became the heroine of much European fiction.

Donna Gracia is another charming personality who attained universal admiration. In her youth, baptism was forced upon her; however, in her heart she remained a devout Jewess. She succeeded her husband as chief of a tremendous banking concern and amassed great wealth. She spent millions to alleviate the lot of her brethren driven out of Spain and Portugal. Nevertheless, she herself could not escape the claws of the Inquisition. She was thrown into prison, where she languished for many months until released at the solicitations of the Sultan Suleiman, who dispatched an especial envoy to Venice. In Constantinople she publicly acknowledged her loyalty to Judaism. Here she joined her daughter Reyna, upon whom the Sultan later conferred the title of Princess of Naxos.

* * *

Again in the history of Jewish martyrdom, woman does not stand a whit inferior to man. She has been ever ready to sacrifice her most precious possessions, to suffer loss of home, fortune and life for the sake of her faith. Her valorous example frequently aroused man to deeds of glory. A story is related in the Talmud that once upon a time pirates captured four hundred Jewish boys and girls, and decided to sell them for a shameful purpose. When the captives learned of the evil purpose of their masters, they began discussing means of escape. A trembling voice sounded a question—"If we drown ourselves voluntarily within the waters of the sea, shall we be entitled to a share in the future world?" In response, the oldest among them cited a passage from the Psalms: "The Lord said, 'I will bring you up from the depth of the sea'." As soon as the girls heard this explanation, they leaped into the water. Thereupon the boys said to themselves, "If the girls, who are not bound to such strict observance of the laws as we are, have displayed so much courage, how much more ought we, who are obligated to fulfill all the commandments, to show it? They, too, threw themselves into the water rather than submit to a life of lechery.

In the eighteenth century, when Hassidism made its appearance in the domain of Jewish life, many a Jewish woman played quite a prominent part in that movement as followers and even as leaders. R. Israel

Baal Shem treated his wife very tenderly; when she departed he refused to remarry, remembering her loyalty and faithfulness in the years of their obscurity and poverty. Udel, the *Baal Shem's* daughter, enjoyed prominence in the hassidic sect quite in her own right as did also her daughter Feige, the mother of Nahman of Bratzlav, whose gifts she helped to develop even more than her husband. *The maid of Ludmir* enjoyed a reputation in Hassidism; having conducted herself like a *zaddik* with a synagogue and following of her own.

CHAPTER VI

WOMAN IN JEWISH LAW

Though rights usually imply duties, this is not the case with woman in Jewish life. Due to her different constitution, as well as her special task of motherhood and wifehood, the Torah exempted her from certain laws and ordinances. The positive commands "thou shalt" whose observance is restricted to a certain date, are not obligatory upon woman, such as donning *tefillin*, or dwelling in booths during the seven days of *Succoth*. She even is exempted from studying the Torah and "meditating therein day and night." She is expected only to acquaint herself with those laws which as a Jewess she is bound to observe.

The Jew pronounces a benediction every morning praising God that he has not been created a woman. This does not mean that woman's position is inferior to man's. It expresses man's satisfaction with his multitude of duties exceeding those imposed upon woman. He thus offers gratitude to his Maker, saying that he does not consider these duties a burden upon himself, but rather a privilege and a source of contentment.

Similarly we may explain why woman is ineligible for the position of rabbi. "Rabbi" means a teacher in

Israel. His most important function is to instruct his people in the principles of the Torah. The ideal Jewish teacher is he who himself practices what he preaches to others. Since a woman is not bound to practice all the commandments, she cannot make a proper teacher of her people.

For the sake of modesty and reserve it also is an old established tradition to have separate pews at synagogue worship for men and women. This does not at all mean that either of the sexes is taboo to the other. On the contrary, recognizing the frailty of human passions this prevents the occurrence of unseemly incidents in a mixed crowd and helps to obtain purity of thought and devoutness of heart and soul, which are the essentials of true prayer.

Apart from the exceptions mentioned, the Torah makes no distinction between male and female. In all religious matters they stand together on a par. It says: "These are the judgments which thou shalt set before them."¹ "Scripture," infer the rabbis, "thus places man and woman on an equal footing with regard to the laws of Judaism."

As a rule, the birth of a child always has been greeted by Jewish parents with joy. Rabbi Hisdah declared his preference for daughters over boys, because "with a girl comes the increase of the world."

The student, at home in the Talmud, will not be surprised to read opinions which apparently may contradict this view. He knows best how to explain and

1. Exodus XXXI, 1.

reconcile the seemingly contradictory utterances. To quote: "When a male is born all rejoice; when a female all are sad." "The birth of a boy is a great joy to the mother as well as the father."² "He who recites the *Habdalah* services over a cup of wine will be rewarded with male children."³ "The world cannot exist without males and females; happy is he whose children are males, woe unto him whose children are females."⁴ The last passage is mentioned several times in the Talmud. On one occasion it is cited to convey the same idea expressed by Ben Sira (a Hebrew scholar, 200 B. C. E.): "A daughter to a father is an unsafe treasure. Because of the sorrow she causes him, he cannot sleep at night. When she is a minor, he is afraid lest she be seduced; when she is of age lest she sin; when mature lest she remain unmarried; after she is married lest she remain childless . . ." Hence it is evident that the rabbinic dicta were not uttered as doctrines of female inferiority. The dissatisfaction with girls should be attributed to the care and anxiety required for their safeguarding. This feeling has been intensified because of the unfavorable conditions the Jew has had to cope with in the diaspora. The birth of a girl meant also a financial liability upon poor and hard-working parents. A boy was expected to become a help to the father in his struggle for life and existence, as well as a protector to the mother. Apart

2. *Niddah* 31b.

3. *Berachoth* 59b.

4. *Kidushin* 82b.

from this, girls always have enjoyed the same parental love and tenderness, and experienced no discrimination or prejudice.

The father was given authority over his minor daughter until her puberty (the age of twelve and a half years). Until then he was granted the right to give her in marriage and in case of extraordinary need even to sell her as a servant, on condition that later the master or his son marry her. Should either one of them refuse to make her his wife, they were commanded to facilitate her release. In any case, she automatically became free upon reaching the age of maturity, at which time she was considered completely independent. The Talmud, however, condemns him who marries off his daughter while she is small, lest when she grows up she will say "I love another." In fact the form of the traditional *kethubah* (marriage contract) speaks only of the bride as personally accepting the groom's proposal and has no alternative provision by which the father might accept for her.

Minor or unmarried daughters have a right to maintenance from the estate of their deceased father, even though he has left nothing for the sons and they must beg from door to door. A clause to this effect is introduced in the *kethubah*. Younger daughters also had a claim on the estate for a dowry equal to that portion which their elder sister received.

CHAPTER VII

AS WIFE AND MOTHER

Adam, the story goes, being the only creature on earth, was overcome by a feeling of loneliness and isolation. God said: "It is not good for man to be alone," and resolved to create Eve as a "helpmate for him." It is evident that she was meant to be more than an instrument for the procreation of the human species. She was made "bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh," for the Creator designed her to be a true and equal companion. As equal partners, man and woman are bidden to cooperate for the mutual attainment of higher happiness in life, or, to borrow from Stevenson:

"A teacher, tender comrade, wife,
A fellow-farer true through life."

"A man shall leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife," says Scripture. Hence developed the Jewish attitude that marriage is a means of human perfection; that neither man nor woman is complete unless united with the other. Commenting upon the passage: "He blessed them and called their name man," the sages say that "when man and woman are truly united, they may be spoken of in the singular as man."

The Hebrew sages pronounced marriage a means of sanctification and divine service. Providence itself is supposed to be instrumental in effecting matrimonial alliances.

With regard to choosing a mate the sages advised: "Descend a step in selecting a wife."¹ It is his duty to elevate her to a higher standard of living, and not to lower her."² Whoever marries a woman for her money will have disreputable children."³ Man is admonished to treat his wife with special care and regard, to "love her as himself and honor her more than himself."⁴ "He shall beware of vexing his wife for she sheds tears easily. He ought to be very careful about the honor of his wife for no blessing is experienced in his house save on her account."⁵

Of saintly Rabbi Isaac Luria (head of the Cabalist school), it is recorded that he had cared little about his food and clothes. Yet to his wife he had given full allowance to dress as her own heart had desired. This was in accordance with the talmudic enjoinder:

"A man should spend less than his means on food and drink, up to his means on clothes, above his means in pleasing and honoring his wife. He must not excite fear in her but commune with her quietly and gently, and avoid being gloomy or angry in her presence."⁶

1. *Yebamoth* 63a.

2. *Kethuboth* 61a.

3. *Kiddushin* 70a.

4. *Yebamoth* 62b.

5. *Baba Metzia* 59a.

6. Maimonides, *Hilchoth Isbuth* XX, 19; *Hullin* 84b.

Man must not consider himself too superior to consult her on his affairs. "If thy wife be short, bend down to ask her counsel."⁷ This corresponds with the conviction of the sages that the Creator endowed woman with an intelligence superior to man's."⁸

Yet, due to the innate keenness of her imagination, woman is frequently more easily allured by prospects of advantage than man. It says: "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof and ate."⁹

As a rule, in his pursuit of worldly affairs, man is prompted by three objectives: namely, to gratify his physical desire for food, to please the eye by making an enviable appearance before others, and to achieve knowledge or wisdom. Scripture thus records that Eve was the first to be fascinated in her expectations to obtain all her desires by eating of the forbidden fruit. She succumbed to temptation.

The admonition the Hafetz Hayim was wont to infer therefrom was that woman must all the more guard herself from being carried away too far by the wings of fancy.

Though polygamy was a legal institution in Judaism until Rabbi Gershon and his synod (Metz at the beginning of the eleventh century) prohibited its

7. *Baba Metzia* 59b.

8. *Niddab* 45b.

9. Genesis III, 6.

practice, it always had been regarded with detestation. There is no doubt that monogamy is the ruling ideal in the Torah; Adam was given but one wife. Abraham would have remained monogamous, had not his wife Sarah, because of her barrenness, urged him to take Hagar. Jacob too, were it not for the deception of Laban, would have married only Rachel, and thus would have remained a monogamist like his father, Isaac. It is a matter of fact that the learned and God-fearing Jews of ancient history are not recorded to have had more than one wife. Only kings and a few of the common people emulated their neighbors and indulged in polygamy. This is in accordance with the rabbinic admonition that one is to sanctify himself by abstaining from excessive indulgence, even in things permitted by law.

The Talmud frequently emphasizes the Psalmist's saying: "All the glory of a princess is within her home." This suggests that although the scope of woman's activity in Jewish life has been extensive, yet her chief distinction is within the confines of her home. Here her genius is at its best and her influence at its noblest. In the Book of Proverbs ¹⁰ "the virtuous woman whose value is above pearls" is portrayed as one who has dedicated herself to the building of her home. "The heart of her husband trusts her; he praiseth her, and her children call her blessed." At her home she was not a drudge or a drone, but an honored overseer. Throughout the ages the Jewish wo-

10. Proverbs, XXXI.

man has taken care of her business affairs, as well as of her household duties. Very often she carried the burden of supporting her husband and family in order to secure for them more leisure and opportunity for the study of the Torah.

The position of the mother is higher under Jewish Law than under any other system of antiquity. By the Fifth Commandment the mother is to be honored equally with the father. The command to "fear" the mother, that is, to treat her with respect, even precedes that of "fearing" the father. In the Book of Proverbs the mother is portrayed as the teacher of wisdom and virtue. So is the Talmud full of expressions and illustrations of reverence and endearment for the mother.

"Strength and honor were her garment." She possessed the right to own property and enjoy civic privileges. She might choose to keep her earnings for herself and refuse to be maintained by her husband. As long as she was married, her husband had the right to the fruit of her estate. When she died no other children but her own inherited her property.

Often the Jewish woman exerted a decisive influence upon the development of her husband's faculties. The story is told in the Midrash that a pious man married to a pious woman had divorced her because of her childlessness. Thereupon he married a wicked woman and she made him wicked. His former wife, on the other hand, married an evil man and she made him righteous. It follows that a great deal de-

pend upon the wisdom and conduct of woman. To quote again from the Book of Proverbs: "The wise of women buildeth her home, but the evil one destroyeth it with her own hands."

Throughout talmudic literature the rabbis are the advocates and defenders of woman's rights. They interpreted the laws and established traditions in accordance with the spirit of the Torah, thus safeguarding and promoting the sanctity of Jewish life. It is interesting to follow their enactments. Of these the *kethubah* is a characteristic example. It is an agreement setting forth the economic obligations which the husband undertakes in favor of his wife. Some scholars call it the woman's "Bill of Rights" for it was primarily intended to protect the woman, that she be not cast aside helplessly to face the world without any visible means of her own, when widowed or divorced. The husband makes a financial promise to his wife, a minimum of 200 zuzim, a substantial sum in those days. The sum has been considerably increased beyond this total. In this contract both her dowry and personal property are guaranteed by his estate. He also pledges himself to work for his wife; to hold her in esteem and faithfully provide her food, clothing, medical care and, if necessary, her ransom; and to give her a decent burial. In the *kethubah* the woman is the center and pivot of all arrangements. The *kethubah* was instituted primarily as a means to solidify and strengthen the bond of married life.

Although according to Jewish law a woman can-

not divorce her husband, she can, however, sue him for a divorce in court which would in certain cases force him to give her a divorce. Grounds include denial of conjugal rights, impotence, unreasonable ailments, unwillingness to provide.¹¹ Since the prohibition of Rabbi Gershon, the husband cannot divorce his wife without her consent.

Generally speaking, throughout the Torah and its vast literature, there are provisions for the protection and exaltation of woman. The foregoing facts prove that long before the rise of the modern era, Jewish woman enjoyed freedom and independence. She distinguished herself beyond the portals of her household. Thousands of years before there was talk of woman's rights, the Jewish woman already had experienced a standard of equality and dignity. Though not "suffragettes," the outstanding feminine personalities in Jewish history in no instances have been deprived of the spiritual advantages and solemn responsibilities bestowed upon them by the Creator. Their past attainments reflect the high esteem which women in general enjoyed in Jewish life.

* * *

The Hafetz Hayim, as the leading spokesman and staunchest guardian of ancient traditions, had given full recognition to women throughout his works; he even wrote special books for them. Frequently in his talks he sought to awaken their con-

11. *Eben Ha'ezer*, ch. 77.

sciousness and make them realize that they were created for great accomplishments; that nothing worthwhile could be achieved without their aid and cooperation.

Though burdened by almost four score and ten, he undertook a journey in the winter of 1925 to the City of Wilna, purposely to address an assembly of more than five thousand Jewish women. The Great Synagogue was selected for that memorable convocation. All men present were ordered to ascend the balcony to make place for the women who crowded the huge assembly hall of the synagogue. In a most inspiring heart-to-heart talk, he urged them to safeguard the sacred institutions of Judaism entrusted to their keeping. Thereafter he blessed his feminine congregants before an open ark. The occasion left an unusually profound impression upon all. It marked a noteworthy innovation in the history of the "Jerusalem of Lithuania," the hoary bulwark of Jewish traditions, distantly removed from the tumultuous battlecries of modern women fighting for the emancipation of their kind.

In the papers which he had been accustomed to issue from time to time, the Hafetz Hayim constantly urged his people all over the world to organize and maintain schools for girls and thereby reconstruct the Jewish home, restore Jewish idealism and rededicate Jewish life to the high task of its mission.

CHAPTER VIII

ON FAMILY PURITY

Wholesome family life is essential to the existence of the Jewish race. It is the cement that solidifies the pillars of its national structure. Upon its purity and sanctity depend all that is noble and sacred in Jewish life.

Holiness is the goal of Jewish aspiration. In choosing the people of Israel, the Eternal intended them to become a holy people. "Sanctify yourselves and ye shall be holy, for I the Eternal your God am holy." The consecration of life is the ultimate purpose of Judaism, the keynote of its commandments. The home, being the chief center of human interest, constitutes an ideal agency for the diffusion of sanctity. The home has been to the Jew more than a castle; it is his sanctuary, which he has ever sought to hallow and beautify. But the home would never have become what it was, is, and will be in the life of the people, were it not for the Jewish woman. She represents the moving spirit of the sanctuary. Scripture calls her *akereth habayith*, the foundation of the home. Says Rabbi Jose, one of the great talmudic sages: "I always call my wife my home."

To maintain the home and thereby the Hebrew

race, the Torah devised various means, physical as well as spiritual. The marital relationship consists in amalgamating two opposing principles into one synthesis. Thus, in the very beginning of the Bible, the Holy One says: "I will make a helpmate opposite him" (literal translation of *ezer kenegdo*). This means, say the sages, that it was the aim of God to merge the opposite qualities of the male and female elements of life into a single harmony.

In order to keep up the pre-marital glow of love for one another, the Almighty provided that woman's physiological structure undergo a periodic ebb and flow, that leave their psychic effects on the relationship between wife and husband. The Jewish laws of separation during menstruation and the methods of monthly purification strive to hold ever fresh and vivid the sentiments of affection and attachment for one another.

That the achievement of this ideal was an object of the law is brought out in the Talmud. Rabbi Meir declared: "Why does the Torah ordain that a menstruous woman be unclean for seven days? Because frequency of association makes him (the husband) feel tired of her; therefore, said the Torah, let her be aloof from him for seven days, so that she may become beloved to him as on the day of the wedding."¹ "Familiarity breeds contempt." Or, as the poets have it:

1. *Niddab* 31b.

"Sweets grown common lose their dear delight."²
and

"Staled by frequency, shrunk by usage into
commonest commonplace."³

The periodic separation of the woman also regulates the health of both husband and wife, making them better able to produce wholesome offspring.

That experience is not alone a safeguard for proper physical and hygienic life; it is much more than that. It aims at the achievement of the ideal in life—saintliness.

Nachmanides, in his treatise *The Sacred Letter*, deals with the most intimate moments in the life of the sexes. He shows how even functions declared by other religions distinctly bestial, can with the saint be elevated into moments of worship and exaltation. The Jewish saint insists on making these relations pure and chaste, stigmatizing even an impure thought as bad as an impure action, if not worse. By reason of the purification of these relations and the thorough sanctification of their functions, the entire vocabulary of love is used by the saints, in their hymns, to symbolize the relations between the human and the divine, and the longing of man for the moment of total absorption into the scheme of the Eternal. The Song of Songs became the allegory describing the reaction between God and Israel. The divine love for His people is visualized by the prophet in the parable:

2. Shakespeare: Sonnet CII.

3. Tennyson.

"For as a young man marrieth a virgin shall Thy sons marry Thee, and as the bridegroom will rejoice over his bride so shall thy God rejoice over thee."⁴ The act of revelation is described as a wedding between heaven and earth. The death of the righteous, when the soul returns to God, is portrayed as a kiss. The mystic sees the losing himself in the divine as a new matrimonial act.

To begin with, menstruation renders a woman unclean. Because of a blood discharge or a mere stain she is required to separate herself from her husband. After the flow (which is never reckoned as less than five days) is over, she is ordained to count seven pure days, and after the sunset of the last to perform the rite of immersion in a ritual pool (*mikvah*) or river, as prescribed by the Jewish law. "And to a woman in her separation during her defilement (*niddah*) thou shalt not approach to uncover her nakedness."⁵ During the period of impurity caresses, as well as any other display of love between man and wife, are strictly prohibited.

On the seventh day of purification, before entering the *mikvah*, the woman is required to wash her entire body thoroughly with warm water, especially where there are wrinkles. She must also thoroughly wash her hidden parts and examine her entire body, lest there remain thereon any particle that might intervene between her body and the water.

4. Isaiah LXII. 5.

5. Lev. XVIII, 19.

of the *mikvah*. She is also commanded to cleanse and comb all her hair and disentangle it, in order that it be neither matted nor knotted. She should likewise cut her nails and remove the tiniest particles of dust from under them. Only after such a procedure may she go to *tevilah*. She is then required to immerse her entire body; not even one hair is permitted to remain outside the water.

It is obvious that the *mikvah* was not meant altogether for physical cleansing, for this is accomplished while the woman is yet outside of it. Its primary object is holiness. Such an end cannot be achieved through any other means but that prescribed in the Torah, which alone brings purification.

Says Maimonides: "It is clear and explicit that all the laws and regulations pertaining to purity and uncleanness belong to the divine decrees in Scripture, which are beyond our reasoning capacity. So too is the ordinance of immersion (*tevilah*) above human comprehension. The uncleanness is certainly not of an external character, like dirt or soil attached to the body which has to be washed off; it is rather an inward uncleanness, which depends primarily upon the devotion (*kavanah*) of the heart, and according to the law can only be removed by the ritual method of ablution."⁶

Rabbi Moses ben Nachman (Nachmanides) says: "The first element from which the Almighty created everything on earth was water, as it is said, 'And

6. See Maimonides, end of *Hilchoth Tabarah*.

the spirit of God hovered over the face of the water.' Hence immersion in a ritual pool, the waters of which are gathered in a natural manner without having been in a vessel, renders the human being, whose origin and being are largely water, as though he were newly created."

This is particularly significant while woman experiences a periodic process of purification, when she undergoes a revival of her physiological elements, preparing herself for procreation.

Realizing that the sanctity of the Jewish people depends upon the purity of womanhood, Rabbi Israel Meir felt deeply pained to see many of his modern sisters ignore the observance of this fundamental law. He wrote books and disseminated pamphlets urging his brethren to fulfill this basic *mitzvah*. He traveled to many a Jewish community, admonishing his co-religionists to maintain the sacred institution of Jewish family purity.

In his works the Hafetz Hayim declares: "The divine Law-giver, who commanded us to adhere to this practice, knew by virtue of His infinite wisdom that it is of paramount importance to the human race. It sanctifies woman and cleanses her from her impurities, so that she does not communicate them to her husband, and as a result her offspring are conceived in purity and holiness. Throughout the ages, pious Jews never neglected the performance of this ritual. Jewish women abode strictly by the stringencies of the law at all times and at all places.

"Alas, in modern times many have come to neglect this vitally essential institution—*tabharath hamishpachah*. In their ignorance they think that the baths in their own homes are adequate substitutes. This is a grave error for, according to our Torah, a woman remains in her state of uncleanness until she has bathed in a *mikvah*. The latter must be constructed according to the prescribed specifications of the law and be approved by an authoritative rabbi.

"It grieves me immensely that I must utter words of exhortation to my brethren, making them aware of their shortcomings regarding such an important principle; for how dare I remain silent and let them continue their sinful ways? The words of God have not changed. His Law will never become obsolete. The sun and the hosts of Heaven could pass away, while the Torah ever remains unshaken.

"The children born of parents who observe the Jewish laws of purity are blessed with pure and holy souls; whereas those who disregard the law have children that are contaminated with an impure spirit."

He further quotes from the *Zohar*:

"The offspring so born is possessed of an impure spirit which remains all his days, for he is built upon a foundation more unclean than all other impurities in the world. Due to the manner of his birth he is easily swayed to do evil, as it is written, 'The wicked are estranged from the womb.'⁷

"Also this sin causes God's presence to depart

7. Psalm 58, verse 4.

from Israel. When they cry to the Holy One, blessed be He, their prayers are rejected because they have distanced themselves from Him.⁸

"Oh, dear sisters and brethren, realize that your deeds make it all the harder for your children to lead an upright life! Know that your folly will be the indirect cause of their downfall. Do not exchange the honor and satisfaction which come to the righteous parents of righteous children, for the shame and disgrace brought about by their wrong-doing and the grief caused by their punishment. Realize, too, that this sin is not to be classed on a par with the eating of pork. The latter merely violates a negative commandment of the Torah, while sins in the realm of family purity involve the punishment of divine visitation (*kareth*—extirpation of the soul) for both husband and wife.

"Furthermore, sex relations during the forbidden period is a sin classed among the three categories of evil—idolatry, incest and murder. Sexual congress with a menstruous woman is like committing an adulterous act. The Jew is therefore bidden to prefer death, rather than allow his soul to be thus defiled.

"What a tragedy that scoffers, unbelievers, and heretic authors have succeeded in their vicious endeavors to mislead innocent Jews in such a vital Jewish principle!

"Every Jew is duty-bound to help his community

8. *Zohar*: Exodus.

construct and maintain an up-to-date sanitary *mikvah*. In modern times, when new and improved *mikvoth* are being devised in accordance with the hygienic rules and regulations, there is certainly less justification for neglecting this *mitzvah* than in the past."

Hence, the laws and traditions of *tabarath ha-mishpachah* are the best means to train and control the cravings and emotions, to regulate the sex habits and condition the periodicity of passion. The interval of separation also provides a chance for rest and recuperation and maintains the bloom of marriage. Such an observance hallows life, sustains happiness, purifies thoughts, ennobles and idealizes endeavors and leads toward a high level of family felicity.



A EULOGY

By

ABRAHAM ISAAC KOOK (ר"צ)
THE LATE CHIEF RABBI OF ERETZ YISRAEL

*Translated from the Hebrew**

By

MOSES M. YOSHOR

* *Habed*, Jerusalem, Tishri, 5694.

A SACRED HERITAGE

A precious light emitted its rays throughout the world for almost a century. Only the generations to come will be able to appreciate fully the brilliance that radiated from that sacred pillar of light. That luminary was Rabbi Israel Meir HaCohen, who, to our grief and sorrow, was taken away from us the 24th day of *Ellul*, 5693.

Our age is too deeply involved in party strife and material pursuits to admire the profound influence wrought by that pure and saintly soul upon the forthcoming generations as well as upon his contemporaries. The present generation is equally incapable of fully comprehending the extent of the great blessings his numerous books contain and their lasting impression upon the development of Jewish life.

His was one of those rare and excellent souls who imbibed the dew of the Heavenly paradise. His only ambition and delight were to serve his Creator. This he sought to accomplish by perfecting his own life and by uplifting that of his people to a higher spiritual standard. Toward the achievement of such an idea, he dedicated his whole being. The unsurpassed dignity of his personality, his profound vision and benevolence, made him a giant of righteousness

and saintliness. He concentrated his utmost to obtain divine grace for his people, by sanctifying them and making them follow the instructions of the Torah. Indeed, his solemn teachings, even more his personal life, exalted his co-religionists and enkindled within them a flame of sacred enthusiasm.

His heart grieved at the sight of so much evil in the world. The low moral standard in matters pertaining to the purity of speech, the prevailing habits of slander and talebearing, gave him no rest until he succeeded in devising a counteracting remedy—his first sacred work, *Hafetz Hayim*. From the title of this book he received the name by which he has since been known.

This book comprises an exhaustive study of the laws and instances concerning the evil tongue. He did not treat this subject, which is so painful to the moral sense, in the usual manner of an ethical preacher, but based every point upon a *halachic* foundation. His arguments are complete, precise, and explicit in their *halachic* aspects.

Yet, after this book had been accepted as a standardized and inspirational text-book by the learned as well as by the masses, the author devoted himself to the preparation of another work, which he named *Shemirath Halashon* (Guarding of the Tongue). This is a moral and ethical treatise in the purest and noblest sense of the word. Its equal can be found only among the works of the great saints and moralists of the remote past.

His generous nature and charitable character caused him to write another book, *Abavath Hesed* (Loving Kindness). This is an ethical and legal exposition of the commendable virtues of kindness between one man and another.

Later he began to take interest in the problems of Judaism all through the diaspora. Though Russian Jewry was then more or less steady in its place, emigration was already in vogue, particularly to the American shores. The new world with its strange environment created new problems for the migrating Jews. His heart felt extremely uneasy about the future of Judaism in those distant lands, where there was no solid foundation of organized Jewish life. He realized the temptation to which the faithful Jew was exposed, the difficulties which he had to surmount in his effort to observe his traditions. To him he addressed the book, *Nidche Yisrael* (Dispersed Israel). This constitutes a manual, a selection, of all the laws whose observance might be challenged by conditions under the new environment. His heartfelt admonitions and solemn exhortations breathe a spirit of tender love and deep sympathy for his brethren across the seas. Concern for their material and spiritual welfare is felt throughout the contents of the book. The author seeks to impress his co-religionists with the importance of Jewish traditions, with their sanctifying and soul-uplifting purpose, with the joy and happiness their observance secures.

The lot of the Jewish soldier snatched away from

his home, and forced to live in a strange environment, hostile to the Jewish spirit, also touched his noble heart. For him, he wrote a manual, under the title, *Machneh Yisrael* (Camp of Israel.) He urges the Jewish soldier to lead a moral life, and live up to the principles of Judaism in accordance with the circumstances.

During that period he was also awake to the rhythmic echoes of true Jewish life as expounded and regulated by the *Shulchan Aruch*. He realized the need for a more extensive and more explicit and final definition of Jewish laws. He therefore wrote his gigantic work *Mishnah Berurah* and *Biur Halachah* in six volumes, as commentaries on the *Orach Hayim*. This work earned him everlasting distinction as a foremost authority on Hebrew jurisprudence whose decisions are binding for all.

In the innermost recesses of his pure heart, the sacred fire of hope for Israel's redemption always had been aglow. He felt convinced that the regeneration of the Jewish people, and the rehabilitation of their Holy Temple, was a possibility of the near future. He therefore perceived the need for a concise and comprehensive code of laws governing *kadashim*, or sacrifices. He saw how neglected a field this section of the Torah had become, and devoted himself to fill the gap by codifying and defining these laws. His work proved an ingenious masterpiece, comparable to Alfasi's codification of those laws which deal with Jewish life in the diaspora. Aside from these major

works, he also published many other volumes, large and small, numbering about forty. He also prepared many important manuscripts for publication.

Notwithstanding his continuous literary occupation and in spite of his advanced age, he found time to support every worthy movement for the sake of Judaism. He used to travel to and participate in all gatherings convened in the interests of the Torah and her sacred institutions. A youthful spirit and vigor dominated all his activities.

These few lines offer but a faint glimpse of the unusual character of this sage, whom it was our privilege to have in our midst, and whose exemplary life passed into the consciousness of our age.

Alas, this great light has been extinguished! The crown of glory has been snatched off our heads.

It should comfort us, however, to think that his sacred memory will forever remain a source of blissful inspiration, while he himself has ascended the heights of heaven and will intercede with the All-Merciful Father in our behalf, to plead for the coming of our Messiah in our days . . . Amen.

AN APPRECIATION

DEAR RABBI YOSHOR:

Through your masterly volume, SAINT AND SAGE, a work of love and reverence, the excellent life of the Hafetz Hayim will become anew a source of inspiration.

The abiding achievement of the Hafetz Hayim, *zekbuto tagen alenu*, lies in this: He succeeded in impressing the fact upon his people that the basic moral principles of Judaism are not mere homiletics—maudlin sentiment or poetic fancies—but paragraphs of Jewish law, demanding as undeviating a conformity as the laws of *Kashruth* and Sabbath. Whereas this truth should be obvious to the student, popular opinion had allowed itself a wide and unjustified margin.

I recommend SAINT AND SAGE to every Jewish library, to every Jewish home—to the men and women who need the rousing message of the Hafetz Hayim's life as youth needs sun and air.

With kindest regards and best wishes, I am

Very sincerely yours,

RABBI LEON JUNG, Ph. D.

Tishri 25, 5697

New York City

A

Aaron, 30, 34, 36, 84, 184, 236
 Abarbanala, Benvenida, 241
 Abaye, Rabbi, 240
 Abba, Rabbi, 101
 Abigail, 239
Abodab Zarab, 181 note 2; 182 note 6
Aboth, xvi, 30 note 1; 109 note 2; 125 note 7; 126 note 8; 182 note 5; 186; 211 note 1
Aboth d'R. Nathan, 196 note 5
 Abraham, patriarch, 228, 229, 252
 Adam, 53, 54, 234, 249, 252
Affirmations of Judaism, 149 note 6
 Agudath Israel, 83
 Ahasuerus, 239
Abavath Hesed, 102, 195, 270
 Akavya ben Mahalalel, 211
 Akiba, Rabbi, 170, 193, 200, 203, 213
 Alexander the Great, 167
 Alexander, Rabbi of, 179
 Alfasi, Rabbi Isaac ben Jacob, 102, 103, 271
 American Civil War, 224
Anfangsgrund der Rechtslehre, 205 note 1
 anti-Semites, 157
 APPRECIATION, AN, 273
 Aristotle, 226
 Ark of the Covenant, 136 note 1
 Artchik, 76, 77
 Asceticism, v, xiii
 "Asceticism," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, xiii note 13
 "Asceticism," *Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia*, v note 1
Asifath Zekenim, 102
 Assyria, 117, 141
 Azazel, 186

B

Baal Haturim, Jacob, 102
Baal Shem Tov, ix, 175, 244
 Baba Batra, 121
Baba Kama, 109 note 2; 206 note 2
Baba Metzia, 198 note 7; 250 note 5; 251 note 7

Babylon, 91, 92, 101, 117, 135, 141, 240
 Bacon, Francis, 138
 Barak, 235
Bar Cochba, 121
Barechu, 213, 214
 Barit, Rabbi Jacob, 32, 33 note 1, 43
 Bartel, 88
 Baruch ben Neriah, 92
Bayith Godol, 135 note 1
Beer Mayim Hayim, 134
 Beilis, Mendel, 68
 Bella, 241
 Bellette, 241
 Belz, *Rebbe of*, 179
 Ben Sira, 247
 Benvenida Abarbanala, 241
 Ben Zuta, 206 note 2
Berachoth, 129 notes 4, 5; 247 note 3
 Berlin, City of, 178
 Beruria, 240
Beth Aaron, ix note 9
 Bethar, 121
 Beth El, 143
Beth Rabbi, ix note 9
Beth Ulphena, 135 note 1
Beth Yisrael, 128 note 1
 Bialik, H. N.; 56 note 1; 138 note 1
 Bill of Rights, 254
Biur Halachah, 271
B'knishtha D'shav V'yasiv, 136
 Bolsheviks, 78, 80, 108
B'Rabanan, 135 note 1
 Brest-Litovsk, 103, 104
 Bublick, Gedaliah, 84
 Burstein, Rabbi Abraham, xix
 Byron, Lord, 169 note 2

C

Cabbalists, vii
 Cain, 204
 Cairo, 137
 Carlsbad, 66
 Caro, Joseph, 102, 215 note 2
 Central Relief Committee of New York, 77
 Central Relief, 54
 Champagne, 137
Childe Harold, 168 note 2

- Christianity, v, 187; *On Christianity*, 168 note 2; 206, 225, 226
 Civil War, American, 224
 Cleopatra, 226
 "*Cohen Gadol*", iii
cobanim, 103
 Collosians, 225 note 3
 Constantinople, 242
 Constitution, 161, 224
 Cordova, 137
 Corinthians, 225 notes 2 and 4
 Cossacks, 88
 Cracow, 137
 CRIME AND PUNISHMENT, 199-207
 Crusades, 182
 Crusaders, 183
 Cuzari, 148
 Cynics, xiii note 13
 Cyrus, 88, 92
 Czar, 62, 68, 72, 73, 88, 156
- D
- Daath Zekenim M'baalei HaTosofoth*,
 181 note 2; 183 note 7
 Danzig, Abraham, 105
 David, i, xii, 237, 238, 239
 Day of Judgment, 176
 Deborah, 235
 Declaration of Independence, 161
derech eretz, 136
derech ha-bayim, iii
 Deuteronomy, 103, 139 note 1
 Dobrusha, 23, 25, 29, 31, 35, 40
 Donna Gracia, 242
 Don Pedro, Viceroy of Naples, 241
dor yasom, ii
Dubner Maggid, 153, 208
- E
- Eben Haezer*, 255 note 11
 Ecclesiastes, xii
 Edison, Thomas, 166 note 2
 EDUCATION, 140-145
 Egypt, 115, 141, 143, 157-160, 226,
 232, 233
 Eibshutz, Jonathan, 106
 Einstein, Professor Albert, 113 note 1
 Eliezer, 229, 234, 240
 Eliezer, Rabbi, 170
 Elijah, *Gaon* of Wilna, vi, 176-177, 179
 Elkanah, 236
 Eretz Yisrael, xix, 92
Eruv Chatzeroth, 64 note 2
 Essenes, vii
 Esther, 235, 238
 Esther Kiera, 242
Ethics of the Fathers, ii, 38
 EULOGY, A, 267-272
 Euthanasia, 180
 Eve 234, 249
Even Sapir, 105 note 1
 Exile, 74-81, 91-93
 Exodus, 82 note 1; 103 note 3; 157-
 160, 232 note 1; 233 note 3;
 246 note 7
ezer kenegdo, 176
 Ezra the Scribe, i, 92
- F
- FAMILY PURITY, 256; 257-265
 First Temple, 88
 Florida, 133
 FOREWORD, i-ii
 Frankfort, 137
 Frieda, 35, 38-42, 91
 Frishman, D., 28 note 1
- G
- Gamliel, Rabban, 193
Gaon of Wilna (Rabbi Elijah), vi,
 ix, 23, 176, 177, 179
 Gehenna, 153, 213, 219
gemiluth basadim, 196
 "General Assembly", 135 note 1
 Genesis, 76, 143 note 2; 191 note 10;
 208 note 3; 231 note 6; 251
 note 9
 Ger, Rabbi of, 179
 Germany, 64-67; 70, 72, 177
 Gershon, Rabbi, 251, 255
 Ginsberg, L., 28 note 1
 Ginzberg, M., 32
Gitin, 182 note 6
 Gordon, Rabbi Israel, 31
 Gordon, Judah Leib, Poet, 30
 Gordon, Rabbi Judah Leib, 63 note 1
 Gospels, 225
 GREAT ASSEMBLY, THE, 82-86

- "Great House," 135 note 1
 Greece, 117, 141, 226
 Greenberg, Dr. Herbert, xix
 Grodzensky, Rabbi Hayim Ozer, xv,
 93, 107
 Grusenber, Oscar, 68, 69, 72
Guide to the Perplexed, vi note 3;
 206 note 2

H

- Haddalah*, x note 11; 247
hachnasath orechim, 197
 Hafetz Hayim (Rabbi Israel Meir
 Kagan): birth, 23-25;
 childhood, 26-29;
 Bar Mitzvah, 30, 31;
 marriage, 34-36;
 in business, 38, 39;
 as rabbi, 39, 40;
 as Talmud instructor, 41;
 gives a bride her dowry, 42;
 author, 43-48;
 founds a yeshivah at Radun, 49;
 his daughters: Sarah & Gitel, 52, 91;
 Feiga, 91;
 at Kovno, 46;
 his simplicity, 45-48, 57-61;
 his exile, 74-81;
 at Smilowitz, 74, 75;
 at Semyatch, 75-77;
 pleads for his pupil Ephraim
 Leibowitz, 67-70;
 at Warsaw, 59;
 pleads for the Jews of Poland, 88, 89;
 addresses women of Wilna, 257;
 his passing, 95-98;
 his faith, 110-118;
 at Moscow, 111, 152;
 his son Abraham, 218;
 testimonials as to the character
 of, ii - iv, xiv - xviii, 84 - 86,
 109, 267-272;
Hafetz Hayim, 44, 120, 269
Hafetz Hayim, "The Life of the, xix
Haftorah, 236, 237
 Hagar, 228, 252
Haggadah, 159
 halachic, iii, 102
Halachoth, 102

- Haman, 239
Hamathmid, 56 note 1; 138 note 2
 Haninah ben Teradyon, 181
 Hannah, 236, 237
Haskalah, 32, 33, 178
hassid, iv, vii, 175, 176, 179, 243
 hassidism, iv, vii, 175, 176, 179, 243
 Hellenism, 226
 Heller, Yom Tov Lipman, 105
 Henry VIII, 203
 Hertz, Rev. Dr. Joseph J., 149 note 6
 Herzog, Dr. Isaac, ii, xix
 Hillel, i, vii, viii, 184, 186, 204
Hillul Hashem, 130
 Hippocrates, viii note 5
 Hisdah, Rabbi, 246
 HOMICIDE, 180-183; 200
 Hosea, 128 note 2
 "House of Instruction", 135 note 1
 "House of Students", 135 note 1
Hovath Hashemirah, 120
 Huldah, 238
Hullin, 250 note 6
 humors, viii note 5

I

- Ibn Ezra, 206 note 2
 Ima Shalom, 240
 INTRODUCTION, v-xix
 Isaac, patriarch, 228, 229
 Isaac of Vienna, Rabbi, 213
 Isaiah, vi note 2; 61 note 1; 168
 note 1; 194 note 2; 207 note 4;
 210 note 2; 260 note 4
 Issachar, 152
 Isserles, Moses, 102

J

- Jabneh, Academy of, ii, 136, 137
 Jacob, 143, 159
 Jacob, Father, 229, 230, 231, 252
 Janai, Rabbi, 125
 Jeans, Sir James, 113 note 1
 Jeremiah, 168, 231 note 1, 238
 Jerusalem, 92, 136, 137, 156, 169
 "Jerusalem of Lithuania", 31, 256
Jewish Encyclopedia, The, 241 note 1
Jewish Forum, The, xvii, xix
Jewish Morning Journal, xix

Jewish War of Independence, i
 Job, 194 note 3
 Jochebed, 232
 Johanan ben Zakkai, i, 136, 193,
 195-196
 Joint Distribution Committee, 54
 Jose, Rabbi, 257
 Joshua, Rabbi, 170
 Judah HaLevi, 90 note 1, 148
 Judah *HaNasi*, 101
 Judah, Rabbi of Radun, 91
 Judaism (book), 223 note 1
 Judith, 235, 239
 Jung, Rabbi Leo, xix, 273
 JUSTICE AND CHARITY, 194-198

K

kadashim, 271
 KADDISH, 213-215
kaftan, 45, 50
 Kagan, Reb Aaron, 30, 36
 Kagan, Reb Arye Zev, 23-28, 31
Kallah, 135 note 1
 Kant, Emanuel, 187 note 8, 205
 note 1
 Kaplan, Ephraim, 172
 Karaites, 205
Kareth, 264
Kenessiah Hagedolah, 82-86
Kerem, 135 note 1
Keithuba, 248, 254
Kethuboth, 250 note 2
Kevurah Hamor, 105
 Khazar, 170
Kiddush, x note 11
Kiddush Hashem, 183
Kiddushin, x, 247 note 10; 250 note 3
King John, xi note 12
kippah shel beshbonoth, 90
 Kittel, R., 149 note 6
 Koenigsburg, 114
 Kook, Late Rabbi Abraham Isaac
 HaCohen, 46, 267-272
 Kovno, 46, 66, 72

L

Laban, 159, 229, 252
 Landau, Ezekial, 106
 Landynski, Rabbi Moses, 62

Leah, 230
 Leib, Reb, 175
 Leibowitz, Ephraim, 65-73
Lekute Halachoth, 102
 Lenora, Duchess of Tuscany, 241-242
 leprosy, 124
 Levi Isaac of Berdichev, Rabbi, 215
 note 3
 Levinson, A. B., 32
 Levinson, Rabbi Hirsh, 62, 70, 79,
 91, 92
 Leviticus, 122 note 5; 125 note 6;
 198 note 8
 liberty, 157-162
 Liberty Bell, 161
 Lida, 58
 LIFE AND DEATH, 211-212
Life of the Hafetz Hayim, "The, xix
 Lincoln, Abraham, 198
 Lipschitz, Israel, 105
 Lithuania, 23, 26, 177
 "Little Talmud", 102
 Lodge, Sir Oliver, 113 note 1
 Lomza, 63 note 1, 137
Love of Israel, The (book), 188
 LOVE THY NEIGHBOR, 184-193
 Lublin, 137
Ludmir, The maid of, 244
 Luke, 184 note 1
 Luria, Rabbi Isaac, vii, 146, 250
 Luther, Martin, 239

M

Maccabean, 239
Macbnech Yisrael, 271
Magen Avraham, 105
Magna Charta, 161
Maimonides, vi-viii, 121, 122, 165;
 182 note 4; 200, 205, 206
 note 2; 250 note 6; 261
Makkoth, 170 note 4
 Malachi, 185
maoth bittim, 74
 Mark, J., 28 note 1
 Marriage, 34
Maskilim, 178
 Matles, Reb Leib, 67
 MATRIARCHS, THE, 228-231
 Matthew, 184 note 1

- Meir, Rabbi, ii, 258
 Memel, 64
 Menahem of Orleans, 241
 Mendelssohn, Moses, 178
 mercy-killing, (Euthanasia), 180-183
 Meretz, 165
 meshulach, 45, 46, 50, 54
meshumad Le'baachis, 105
 Messiah, 86, 103, 104, 170, 206,
 214, 271
Metaphysical Elements of Ethics, 188
 note 3
 Methuselah, 216 note 1
 Micah, 194 note 1
 Midrash, 48, 124, 125, 145, 164 note
 1; 186, 195, 230, 253
mikvah, 260, 261, 263, 265
 Millikan, Dr. Robert A., 113 note 1
 Minsk, 41, 44, 137
minyán, 197
 Mir, 137
 miracle, 175
 Miriam, 232, 233
Mishnah Berurah, iii, 102, 271
M'kor Hayim, 44 note 3
 monogamy, 252
 Montaigne, v note 1
 Moore, Professor, 223
 Moscicki, 88, 108
 Moscow, 111, 152
 Moses, i, 84, 86, 93, 101, 125, 146,
 157, 160, 161, 162, 165, 205,
 232, 234, 236
 Mt. Moriah, 103, 170
 My Religion, 184 note 1
- N
- Nabal, 239
 Nachmanides, 259, 261
 Nahardea, 137
 Nahman of Bratzlav, 242
 Nahman, Rabbi, 240
 NATIONAL HEROINES, 235-239
 Nazarene, 225
 Nazarites, vii
 Nebuchadnezzar, 168
 Negro, 224
 Newton, 113 note 1
New York Times, The, 24 note 2
- Nidche Yisrael*, 102, 128 note 1, 270
Niddah, 247 note 2; 251 note 8;
 258 note 1; 260
Night Thoughts, 167 note 3
 Nile, 158, 232
 Nissim, *Rabbenu*, 103
 Numbers, 103, 232 note 2
- O
- Odessa, 92
Onkelos, 76
 Optimisim, 168-171
Orach Hayim, 102, 271
Or Zarua, 213
- P
- Padua, 137
 Paganism, 226
 Palestine, 93
 Paris, 137
 Passover, 41, 42, 75
Pene Yehoshua, 105
 Penza, 68
Peri Megadim, 105
 Persia, 142, 226
Pesachim, 186 note 6
Petach Tikvah, 93
Phaedon, 181
 Pharaoh, 157, 159, 160, 232
 Philo Judeus, 127
 Poland, 87-89, 92
 POLES, A WARNING TO THE, 87-89
 Ponce de Leon, 133
 Portugal, 242
 PRAYER, 127-132
 Pressburg, 137
 PRIVILEGED HOMICIDE, 180-183
 Proverbs, vi note 2; 31 note 2; 40
 note 1; 140 note 1; 192 note
 12; 193, 252-254; 263 note 7
 Psalms, i, xii, 43 note 1; 122 note
 4; 125, 210 note 1; 243
 Puah, 232
 Pumbeditha, 137
 Purim, 53, 54, 235, 238
- R
- Rabbenu*, 101
 Rachel, Mother, 229, 230, 231

- Radun, 37, 49, 52-54, 58, 65, 66,
79, 137, 199
- Raphael HaCohen, Rabbi, 23, 24
- Rashi, 121, 136 note 1; 198 note 8;
232 note 2; 240
- Rav, 101
- Rebekah, Mother, 229, 252
- Red Sea, 233
- Reform, 178
- "Religion of Love", 182
- Religion of the People of Israel, The*,
149 note 6
- Restoration, i
- Revel, Dr. Bernard, iv, xix
- Reyna, Princess of Naxos, 242
- Rome, 117, 125, 142, 226
- Rosenfeld, S., 28 note 1
- Rosengarten, Isaac, xix
- Rosenzweig, Abraham, 152
- Rosh Hashanah, 64, 155, 237
- Rothschild of Frankfurt, Lord, 50, 51
- Russian Espionage, 62-73
- Russian Jewish Encyclopedia*, 24
note 2
- Ruth, 238
- S
- Saadia Gaon, Rabbi, 206 note 2
- SABBATH, 71 note 3; 78, 145 note
6; 146-154, 175 note 1; 182
note 4
- SACRED HERITAGE, 268-272
- Sacred Letter, The*, 259
- sacrifices, 271
- Sadducees, 205
- SAINT AND SAGE, iii, iv; 273
- Saintliness and Scholarship, v-xix
- St. Petersburg, 68
- Salanter, Rabbi Israel, 28 note 1; 114
- Salome Alexandra, Queen, 239
- Samuel of Bagdad, 241
- Samuel, Book of, 181 note 1; 191
note 9; 237 notes 1-2
- Samuel, Maurice, 56 note 1
- Samuel, prophet, 236
- Sanctum Sanctorum, xi
- Sanhedrin, 200, 202, 203
- Sapir, Jacob HaLevi, 105 note 1
- Sappho, 226
- Sarah, Mother, 228, 229, 252
- Saul, King, 181, 237
- Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia*, v note 1
- Schopenhauer, 168 note 2
- Schreiber, Rabbi Moses, 106
- Schulman, Charles H., xix
- Shechinah*, 229
- Shifra, 232
- Shiloh, 236
- Second Temple, i, vii
- Seder Kadaschim*, 102-103
- Seder*, on Passover, 42
- Semaboth*, 182 note 4
- Semyatch, 74, 78
- Sermon on the Mount, 185 note 1
- Shakespeare, xi; 259 note 2
- shalshelet hakabalab*, i
- Shemazai, 186
- Shemirath Halashon*, 48 note 5; 120,
185, 189; 192 note 11; 193 note
14; 214 note 1; 230, 269
- Shem Olam*, 102
- Shevuoth*, 182 note 3
- Shimon, Reb, 35
- Shlome HaCohen of Wilna, Rabbi,
33 note 1
- Sb'losko Sb'ochlu K'echod*, 128 note 1
- shofar*, 64
- Shovuo*, Feast of, 238
- Shulchan Aruch*, xiv, 50 109, 172,
178, 271
- Shumor, 105
- Siberia, 65, 78, 88
- Silberberg, Rabbi Naphtali, 59, 60
- Simon ben Gamliel, Rabbi, 126
- Simon ben Shatach, Rabbi, 203, 205
- Sinai, 84, 134, 206
- slander, 43-45, 119-126
- Slobodka, 137
- Slutzky, 103
- Slutzky, 118
- Smilovitz, 74, 75, 78
- Smithline, Dr. Jacob, 108
- Smolenskin, Perez, 105 note 1
- Snovsk, 74, 78
- Socrates, 165 note 2
- Solomon, 216
- Soloveitchik, Rabbi Joseph Ber, 103,
104

Song of Songs, 259
 Soviet Russia, 80
 Spain, 133, 242
 Stern, Dr. David S., xix
 Stevenson, 249
Students, Saints and Scholars, 28
 note 1

Succab, 196 note 6
 Suleiman, Sultan, 242
 Syria, 125, 239

T

Tabernacle, 233, 234, 236
tabarath bamishpachab, 263, 265
 Talmud, viii, xiii, 45, 50, 53, 69,
 101, 102, 107, 124, 128, 135,
 144, 146, 163-167, 172, 184,
 195, 197, 199, 217, 240, 243,
 246, 247, 248, 253, 258

Tana D'be Elijah, ix note 8
Tanchuma, 45 note 4; 195 note 4
tefillin, 128, 197, 245

Tebillim, i

Telzhi, 137

Temple, 92, 103, 128, 137, 196

Tennyson, 132, 259 note 3

tevilab, 261

Theodora, Empress, 226

Therapeutae, xiii note 13

Tiberias, 137

Tikun Hatzos, 132

Tisha B'ab, 121, 169, 170

Toledo, 137

Toledoth Adam, x note 10

Tolstoy, 184 note 1

TOMBSTONE, 216-219

Torah, xii, 44, 70, 76, 82, 93, 116, 117,
 122, 125, 134, 138, 142, 144,
 163-167, 172, 184, 187, 198

Torath Cobanim, 102

Trop, Rabbi Naphtali, 62

Tur Orach Hayim, 215 note 2

tzitzith, 128

U

Udel, daughter of the *Baal Shem*, 244

Ukba of Ludikin, 213

V

Vaad HaYeshivoth, 54, 55, 92, 93

Venice, 242

Vespasian, 136

via media, vi

Vienna, 82

"Vineyard", 135 note 1

W

WAR AND PEACE, 208-210

WARNING TO THE POLES, A, 87-89

Warsaw, 54, 71, 103

Washilishok, 41, 43

Wasserman, Rabbi Elchanan, 70

Wilna, 31, 32, 43, 54, 66, 67, 79,
 135, 137, 177, 180, 256

Witebsk, 70

Wolozhin, 24, 137

Worms, 137

Y

Yahrzeit, 108, 214

Yalkut Shimoni, 237 note 1

Yaltha, 240

Yebamoth, 250 notes 1 and 4

Yeshivah, 135-137

Yeshivah Hafetz Hayim, The (at
 Radun), 49-56, 62-73, 78

Yetzer Hara, vi

Yiddish Tageblatt, 84

Yom Kippur, xi-xiii

Yoseph of Slonim, Reb, 60, 61

YOSHOR, Rabbi MOSES M., ii-iv, xvii;
 267, 273

Young, Edward, 167 note 3

Z

Zacks, Rabbi Mendel, 91

zaddik, 175

Zabor L'Miriam, 120

Zalman, Reb, ix, x

Zebulun, 153

Zedakah, 195, 196

Zedekiah, King, 238

Zeitzik, Rabbi Bezalel, 74

Zelaphehad, daughters of, 233, 234

Zephanich, 238

Zhetel, 23, 25, 36

Zion, 90-94, 103, 207

Zohar, 263

Zohar Hadash, 186 note 7

Zwiozick, Captain, 70



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